
OLD ENGLAND

ENGLAND · AN AMERICAN VIEW


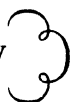


ENGLAND
WAS AN ISLAND ONCE

By ELSWYTH THANE
Author of Young Mr Disraeli, Tryst,
etc.



OLD ENGLAND

 A FRENCH VIEW 

By HENRI DE VIBRAYE

*Translated by Gerard Hopkins
and with a Portrait Frontispiece*

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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD · 1941

THIS book was written in 1938 at the suggestion of the present publishers. Having read and enjoyed a short account of his experiences with the British Army in the war of 1914-1918 entitled *Sans doute il est trop tard*, they invited the Comte de Vibraye to incorporate that delightful booklet in a longer work describing the English and their customs from a French point of view. M. de Vibraye was good enough to comply, his manuscript was duly received and the work of translation started.

The author wished to see and approve the English version, and in consequence the process of bringing the book to publication was a slow one. It was, however, getting ready for press in the winter of 1939 (was actually included in Constable's spring list for 1940) and would have appeared as promised, but for the German invasion of Holland and the lightning campaign which followed, ending in the collapse of France. Manifestly, to publish a Frenchman's pre-war comments on English life at a moment when Great Britain had been deserted by her ally and left to fight Germany

alone, would have been folly; so *Old England* was put aside until conditions were more favourable for its appearance.

Events have developed in such a way—and our knowledge of the causes of the fall of France has so increased—as to produce those conditions with unexpected speed. Superficially at least M. de Vibraye could ask for no more dramatic vindication of many of his criticisms of his own country than the events of the last few months, and the English reader will detect in the unashamed anti-modernism of this Frenchman's attitude towards certain English institutions and social tendencies an explanation of much which is puzzling to him in the policy of the Pétain Government.

M. de Vibraye belongs to the old aristocracy of France. He believes in benevolent feudalism as the social order able to give the greatest happiness to the greatest number. He is a bitter enemy of the Third Republic—which he regards as a carnival of self-seeking politicians, chicanery, party-bargaining, shoddiness and corruption. He is a devout Catholic, a hater of all the foreign influences (including the Jewish) which he considers have debauched the true France, and claims to be one of the very small surviving minority of Frenchmen who are really French, and by whom alone the sacred traditions of France are cherished and kept alive.

It may be thought that a book written in this spirit must be arrogant and absurd. *Old England* is neither. Comparing his country and ours, M. de Vibraye is outspoken and not afraid of lamenting the passing of a social hierarchy; but he is humorous, a genuine admirer of an England he has known well and loved, able to laugh at himself, and admirably clear-sighted as to the misunderstandings and dislocations which so

often hinder a mutual liking between French and English.

We have been told that in the opinion of Marshal Pétain and General Weygand, the need of France is for a spiritual regeneration, a passing through tribulation to the re-discovery of her soul. Precisely that conviction lies at the back of M. de Vibraye's argument, though when he wrote it he had no notion how tragically near that tribulation was.

The trouble is, however, that, if one were able to discuss matters with him now, he would probably be found as wrongheaded as ever over the causes of his country's fall. He would refuse to admit that his own lot—the monarchists (with their slum-area, the Cagoulards)—were as guilty as the Communists of making decent republican government impossible. He might be embarrassed to explain the survival of the least reputable elements of the previous regime, to account for the fact that those who have so far profited by the catastrophe—the Lavals, the Flandins and the Bonnets—are politicians of the kind he has most bitterly assailed. But to no one does lofty generalization, as a means of evading awkward questions, come more easily than to the extremist right or left; and M. de Vibraye (with as much vigour and suavity as in this book—only too aptly but for the wrong reasons—he diagnoses her pre-war sickness) would perhaps put a gloss on Vichy, and maintain that France can only rise again after suffering with dignified submission humiliation at the hands of her hereditary enemy.

One can refuse to endorse M. de Vibraye's estimate of his own country, and yet claim that events have given it particular interest. Undoubtedly he represents a point-of-view; and it is right that we in England should be aware that such a point-of-view exists.

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As for his judgments on our own country, we can test them for ourselves. We shall probably feel that war has destroyed the topical basis of many of his arguments and that, even were there no war, they are highly disputable. But disputability is much of the charm of this urbane, obstinate, well-bred and cheerfully-prejudiced book; and it is the more enjoyable to laugh with M. de Vibraye over his experiences with the Cavalry Corps during the last war, if at the same time we are spoiling for an argument with him over some challenging and utterly unreasonable criticism of our minds and manners.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE · 1939

A SMALL book about the last war, called *No Doubt It Is Too Late* gave me the idea from which have sprung these "Commentaries". The reader will find in them none of that profound thought which adorns *Considérations sur la France* by J. de Maistre, but I feel convinced that it is not yet too late to add my voice to those which have already spoken of the English and their country. It might, I think, be argued that no subject is, in fact, more topical.

It has long been the fate of England to divide, as does no other country, the public opinion of France into two distinct camps, the relative importance of which has varied from period to period and, at times, even from month to month. It may not be out of place to record here the view expressed several years ago by a French statesman (though he was speaking, it is true, of the general aspect of our own internal policy) that—"we are living at a time in which the very problems at issue are but imperfectly grasped." This imperfect grasp is nicely summed up by a phrase often on the lips of men and women of the world, which

may be expressed in the vernacular somewhat as follows: "...Taken individually, the English are often decent enough fellows: but as a people they're a nasty lot." Consequently, there is a sharp divergence of opinion according to the preoccupation of the speaker with the individual or with the national whole to which he belongs. It is to be noted, however, that in certain cases, and in certain epochs, the liking for particular persons has been extended to cover the nation, while in others, the dislike of the nation has involved its separate citizens. A collective body, however, should be judged by a knowledge of its component individuals. In the case under review it is as a result of my intimacy with persons that I have been led to formulate the following generalization: "It is, on the whole, true to say of the English that, with the exception of certain great men in whom birth or natural temperament have developed a high degree of scepticism and cynicism as a result of their taking a high and detached view of persons and of events, they are just the opposite of what they would like, and usually claim, to be." This difference between the desire and the reality is truer even of the country as a whole than of individuals. The Englishman, generally speaking, would *like* to be thought honest, loyal, vigorous and practical: he is too often, in fact, timid, crafty, feeble and unpractical. This statement is not meant to be a diatribe. I am terribly French in my sympathies—one of the very few left of whom that can be said—and I will offer as a counterweight to the view I have just laid down this parallel generalization which my fellow countrymen will tend to find unflattering: the Frenchman *knows* that he is frivolous, untruthful, pleasure-loving, impulsive and a maker of difficulties. It is a commonplace that the Frenchman takes pride in his vices, and is, to

that extent, a *vulgarian*, while the Englishman glories in the virtues to which he lays claim, and is, consequently, a *pharisee*.

My aim is to discover whence spring the two currents of opinion, like and dislike, between which France and the French so continually oscillate. I shall not concern myself with the opinions of the host of foreigners who have invaded our country and are in process of destroying what little remains of its genuine complexion—opinions which are sometimes regarded abroad as a true expression of the French mind.

When I shall have traced impartially the various complex points of view, the impressions at times so difficult of analysis but which are responsible for giving rise to feelings often amounting to fervent love or extreme hatred, the reader will be in a position to deduce the prerequisites for mutual understanding between the two countries. I shall trace from their earliest beginnings the "English" impressions of a Frenchman who is well known to me, but who, like a certain man mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, may be styled "Legion".

I shall recount in chronological sequence the progress of my knowledge of, and acquaintance with, the English, before, during, and after the war. Throughout I shall set down perfectly *sincerely* what my reactions have been. They are, believe me, identical with those that might be recorded, in various circumstances, of a very large number of the traditional, the pure-blooded, Frenchmen who *still* retain sufficient independence of spirit to hold themselves aloof from foreign influences, whether those influences come from England, from Russia, or from many other countries and under many different disguises.

And now, after all the critical statements which I

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have so far uttered, and after comparing what I have seen in my own country and in the countries beyond its frontiers, I can say here and now, that if I had my life to live over again, it is as an Englishman that I should choose to live it, in spite of the many signs that I have noted of England's decadence.

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CHAPTER ONE

EARLY YEARS. CHILDHOOD

My choice of "Old England" as a title was dictated by the fact that many children brought up in Paris towards the end of the nineteenth century long held the belief that those words referred only to a shop situated at the corner of the Rue Scribe and the Boulevard des Capucines, the delivery vans of which were strange looking vehicles drawing their inspiration from what, in London, were called "Hansoms", and in Paris, "Cabs", with the driver perched high up on a little seat at the back of the main body of the contraption, the reins passing above the heads of the passengers, or, in this case, of the merchandise in process of transport. The "Cabs" belonging to "Old England" were painted a bright red and were such as to appeal to the imagination of children and their nurses. Their appearance was no doubt chiefly responsible for our impression that "the English" (for the young are always inclined to generalize) were a nation of "cards".

Those of us who, during their early years, were

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confided to the care of English women soon came to be inspired with a lively admiration for the mysterious land, the great and wonderful island, to which their custodians always referred in tones of enthusiastic wonder. I can still hear Miss Kelly (our simplification of O'Kelly) speaking of the "Dear Old Queen", and of the sailors and soldiers of her native country. Picture postcards at that time were a rarity, but all self-respecting French families had numerous albums of such things in colour, Kate Greenaway providing the poetic, Caldecott the serio-comic note.

Let me repeat that the first natives of the mysterious island with whom I came in contact were English nurses and English governesses. For the most part they were small, highly-coloured women with large teeth and quick tempers. Their personal cleanliness was a doubtful quantity, and they exhaled a strong smell. For all that, even in those days, they made great pretensions to cleanliness, to a knowledge of hygiene, and of the science of education in so far as it was concerned with the upbringing of small boys. I knew more than one whose routine of "dressing" consisted in removing the upper part of the child's night-dress, tying the arms round its waist, and then rubbing the exposed portion of the body with a sponge soaked in cold water. This process, she maintained, was "so healthy". No other portion of the human anatomy was ever mentioned. These English women considered that the body stopped short at the waist. Beneath that was the region of the stomach which probably extended as far as the knees. There was also the *tub* (pronounced *tobe*), but presumably the use of this had been discontinued for the reason that to our grandmothers it seemed *so* improper!

Apart from what we were taught by our English governesses, our knowledge of English was confined to the words which we heard our parents use (with quite atrocious pronunciation) in relation to various forms of outdoor sport.

No one did more to instil a love of England into young French breasts than Jules Verne. His British heroes were not, it is true, in every respect without blemish, but they did rejoice in precisely those qualities which the English like to think are peculiar to themselves;—marked independence of thought, courage, fidelity, terrific energy and cast-iron health, a natural aptitude for all physical feats, and a somewhat romantic outlook—the whole rounded off by a nobility of character that nothing can shake, perfect loyalty, and a gift of superb coolness. I believe that somewhere in the north of France there is a statue to Jules Verne: there certainly ought to be one in England. In my day there was not a French child above a certain social level but had read *Round the World in Eighty Days*, *Captain Grant's Children*, and many more of those extraordinary adventure stories. What an almost mythical figure is that Phileas Fogg, who took on a bet that he would make the circuit of the globe within a period which at that time seemed quite miraculously short. He carried in his head the time-tables of every railway company and every shipping line in the world. He was a magnificent eccentric, capable, by sheer strength of purpose, of surmounting every obstacle, and finally reached his goal a day earlier than he expected because he had forgotten that he was travelling with the sun! What a figure he cut when compared with his manservant—Passe-Partout—whom our author equipped (quite without malice) with all the more absurd characteristics of his countrymen. As to *Captain Grant's*

Children, their story is a regular epic dedicated to the glory of English youth.

Jules Verne and our English governesses—those were the pioneers who built up our feeling of friendship for England. The latter we divided into the “beasts” who were terribly quick with the disciplinary hand, and the “darlings” who were outrageous in their spoiling of the pupils committed to their charge. These regarded the children as their own property, much disliked it when the parents took them out walking, and made scenes when they kept them too long in their company. The result was often just the opposite of that aimed at by an English education, and the products emerged as nothing but little softies.

However that may be, this English education, or, rather, upbringing, gave a strong pro-English prejudice to our young minds. I remember how a small cousin of mine burst into tears when I showed him a picture of the Great Fire of London in 1666, saying, at the same time, with deliberate malice “served them jolly well right: they burned Joan of Arc, didn’t they?”

In addition to this slightly inferior social world, we had several English relations, or relations who had married English wives. We were always hearing of Aunt “Crévn” (Mrs Augustus Craven), and now and again we saw her with our own eyes. We did not know then that she was really thoroughly French, having been a Mademoiselle de la Ferronnays before her marriage, or that she was the author of a number of novels which had enjoyed a certain renown. There was, too, another aunt, Mrs Standish, whose clothes and fashion of hairdressing were, so the story went, modelled on those of the Princess of Wales (Queen Alexandra), with whom she was on terms of friendship.

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Like the Princess, she too had a fine collie dog called "Fern".

A time soon came, however, when we said good-bye to the world of English nurses and governesses (we always referred to each of these as "So and So's 'Miss'"). We were growing up, and it was necessary that the female element should be removed from our education. We were given a tutor who "knew" English. It is quite impossible for those who never heard it, to imagine the kind of English which the series of well-meaning gentlemen known as English tutors contrived to speak. I maintain that, in general, the French have less *ear* than any other race in the world. This fact explains their remarkable inability to cope with foreign languages. Many educated Frenchmen have a profound knowledge of English so far as reading is concerned, and are well acquainted with English literature, but my point is that, since they do not understand, have never grasped, the peculiar *sound* of English, their mastery of the language is always incomplete, and that consequently they never really make contact with those who speak it. The proof of this is that one never finds an English book translated by a competent French writer that does not contain a number of faulty renderings. The English language, like the English people, is full of subtleties. In order to grasp the *overtones* of these it is essential to be able to *hear* them, to reproduce their sound, their rhythm, their intonation. That is precisely what, unfortunately, our tutors—most of whom were priests—could never do.

This ignorance of the essentials of a language, its *music*, was still more, I think, in evidence at the schools to which we were sent, usually between the ages of ten and thirteen. No matter how well the master might know English, the pupils, during those years of the

early 'nineties, could only get their diplomas by dint of producing a written theme and translating orally from an English text. It was perfectly easy to succeed in both tests and yet to have no real mastery of the English language. The examiners of those days scarcely ever had more than a knowledge of written English. The same method held for the learning of German which I had to take since I was destined for the Military College of Saint-Cyr where it was obligatory. But since I was far more interested in England and in English, it was always a delight for me, when I came on English words in some book or other, to get one of my friends who *knew* to read them aloud to me. The result, usually, was somewhat as follows: "Zi aouze if mai fazair . . .", etc. (*The house of my father*). One of the Professors of English, however, in the school to which I went was a genuine Englishman, a true type of the "early Victorian". He was small, fat, high-coloured and fair, with smooth hair carefully parted near the middle, a beard, or rather whiskers, à la Franz-Joseph, and light eyes. I remember that his name was Rickman, and that his mortal enemy was the drawing-master Léaud, a thin, dark man with extravagantly curled hair and moustache, and eyes the colour of coal.

But what chiefly interested us boys, all between fourteen and sixteen years old, about the English, were the pictures, the colour-prints of riders and horses. These we collected wherever they could be found. The first impression conveyed by these chromolithographs was true and accurate. Taine speaks somewhere of the "permanence of the earliest objects of the imagination". I would go further and say that not only was this impression made on the young by what I may call the sporting side of English life, indestructible, it was

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the most accurate, the most completely characteristic impression which could have been given of the race in question. There is nothing like it in any other country. All of the spirit of sport that reappeared in France after its destruction by the Revolution, we owe to England, and in sport the two peoples will always find a meeting ground which may serve as a basis for still further mutual understanding.

CHAPTER TWO

YOUTH

THE spirit of sport is a magnificent thing, the moral aspect of which it is impossible to stress too strongly. Only one people in all the world, I believe, possess it to a higher degree than the English—the Maoris. While, however, the English never allow their sense of sportsmanship to stand in the way of their real interests, the Maoris respect it even in matters of life and death. There is a story that when the two peoples were engaged in mortal combat upon the results of which depended the very existence of the Maoris, the latter, on perceiving that their better-armed adversaries were short of ammunition, refused to continue fighting until a fresh supply had been brought up. Would the inhabitants of the British Isles, invaded by the Germans or the Bolsheviks, follow the example of those New Zealand natives? I am afraid—I hope—that they would not!

The spirit of sport derives directly from the spirit of Chivalry, and can be summed up in this phrase, applied always to the enemy of the moment—"Give

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him a chance". That attitude is the basis of all good manners in the world of sport. Hunting an animal with hounds instead of trapping and shooting him; using a rifle instead of a shot-gun in deer-stalking; fishing for trout with flies and not with worms; not hitting below the belt in boxing; shooting birds only on the wing and under the most difficult conditions of range and speed—all these instances are examples of sportsmanship. In England everyone at once realizes their rightness; in France, a small minority, the "happy few"; in other countries, scarcely anybody.

But the high peak of good sportsmanship, the thing that of all others makes for a real brotherhood of feeling between Frenchmen and Englishmen, is our taste, our, let me say, mutual love (shared with no other race) for hunting, by which I mean no more and no less than the tracking and destruction of four-footed animals by means of hounds.

It is the one form of sport in which the hunted has the preponderance of chance on his side, in which, if the prey succeeds in escaping his pursuers, he suffers no evil effects from the ordeal to which he has been exposed. Which is more than can be said of the partridge which gets away with a cargo of slugs, or the fish which carries off the hook in its jaws.

The young Frenchman with a passion for hunting knows perfectly well that there is only one country in the world the inhabitants of which speak the same language as himself, and that is Great Britain. The sport has not, it is true, developed along quite the same lines among the two peoples. It would take too long, and would be irrelevant to the purpose of this book, to enter into the details of this parallel evolution. The main difference is that in France hunting is mainly a matter of the hounds and is carried on for the most part

in wooded country, while in England what most counts is the horse and the riding across open fields and jumping of obstacles. In France the quarry consists, for the most part, of the deer, the roebuck and the wild boar; in England of the fox. In both countries, however, the main principle is the same, and the agents are identical—men, hounds, and horses.

At this point the comparison must needs become slightly forced, since we, in France, have no mounts comparable to the English, and especially the Irish, hunters, nor dogs with anything like the stamina and speed of the pure-bred English fox-hounds. Let me add that all our really fine equine strains are the result of crossing with island breeds, such, for instance, as the Anglo-Norman and the Anglo-Arab, and that all our classic breeds of hound have a similar origin. For this reason they are all known as “crosses”—Anglo-Poitevins, Anglo-Saintongeais, and the rest.

Such subtleties may have been beyond the grasp of the average young man who made his *début* in the hunting field round about the year 1890, but he could hardly help noticing that Mr So-and-So's magnificent mount was of Irish blood, or that Mr X had imported four hunters from England. . . . Naturally we all had English bridles and English saddles. . . . The more elegant among us wore boots with tops in the English manner, and the only tolerable hunting clothes, particularly breeches, were those cut by an English tailor. Nobody would look at a crop that had not come from Swaine.

Some of us had only one ambition—to go to the races. The whole vocabulary of the course was English. It would have been absurd, almost indecent, to go racing without an elementary knowledge of the relevant English terms. Most of these no one has

ever attempted to translate—*starter, handicap, steeple-chase, jockey, crack*, etc., etc.

Besides, in those distant days of my youth, racing in the English manner had not long been introduced into France. I remember hearing that one of my uncles, the Comte des Cars, had taken a leading part in naturalizing the sport, and that he himself (when I knew him he was already old but still vigorous) had been one of the first “gentlemen-riders”. My father had seen the growth of the big race-courses of Paris and its neighbourhood which became, in fact, so many islands of English language and custom. In my childhood many thoroughbred English horses, it is true, were actually raised in France, but recourse was had oftener than it is now, to crossing with the great names of the racing world from across the Channel. Trainers and jockeys were all English. If, by some extraordinary freak, a Frenchman found himself among them, he did his very best to adopt their appearance, their manners, and—strange but true—their very accent.

This mania for imitating the English accent was to be found, and still is, in continental circles having nothing to do with horses: fashionable women, sportsmen, coachmen, tailors and other tradesmen in the clothing line. I once dreamed of founding, for their benefit, a Chair of the “Anglo-Montmartrois” language at the Collège de France, but was unable to follow up the idea.

Shooting was as popular then as now. Dogs were always known as *setters, pointers*, and *retrievers*; guns as *hammerless*, and these *must* have come from Purdey’s or be indistinguishable from his productions. I need hardly add that, unless one wanted to be taken for a wretched provincial, it was essential, at any shoot with pretensions to elegance, to be dressed in the English

style—with jackets, breeches, leggings, stockings and overcoats, all from across the Channel. Then, too, there were the *Field trials* (pronounced “filtréal”) which were always followed with great interest by my father and my uncles.

Apart from shooting, everyone knows, and knew then, that yachting was as typical an English form of sport as football, tennis, cricket, and various other games. The vocabulary proper to each of these came naturally from the other side of the Channel. In swimming one spoke, in a French accent, of the *overarm stroke*, shortened into *Over* (pronounced “Ovaire”), the *crawl*, the *trudgeon*, etc.

All these delights (for I am convinced that the real meaning of the English word sport is delight or distraction) had thus come originally, or come back, from England. I say come back, because some of my compatriots may argue with reason that fox-hounds have descended in direct line from French dogs, that the English thoroughbred is the child of the Arab stallion, that tennis originated with our *paume*, while the very word sport is derived from the old French “desport”. I am perfectly well aware of all that, and of other facts as well, such, for instance, as that England is our fairest “dominion” conquered in 1066, but since permitted to develop a considerable degree of autonomy . . . To all such arguments I say “Let bygones be bygones”—I trust that my English will be forgiven. All that I have described above is as I knew it at the end of the nineteenth century.

I know more than one Frenchman who used to protest against these English fashions and English expressions, who was nevertheless much flattered by election to our Jockey Club!

To our young people of those days (already crushed

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beneath the weight of twelve-hour days with books and paper) the whole world of pleasure and sport, as well as of elegant dressing, seemed to hail from across the Channel. It is untrue to say that "the habit does not make the monk". Again, when we compared our own situation as schoolboys with the situation enjoyed by our English opposite numbers, we were forced to recognize that it was we who were the "poor relations". There is a whole world of difference between the member of Eton or Harrow (I mention only the two most famous of several institutions of a similar nature) and the pupil of one of our French colleges or lycées. The Eton boy, with his Eton jacket, his striped trousers, his top-hat, is a "gentleman" compared with the slovenly schoolboy with whom we are familiar. The life lived in these English foundations, in the middle of greenery and handsome monuments seems to us one of organized recreation. The difference is still greater when it comes to comparing the existence of an undergraduate of Oxford or Cambridge with that of the student at one of the faculties of Paris or of the great university cities of the provinces. When, later, I paid a visit to Oxford and Cambridge, I regretted that I could not make use of Mr Wells's "time machine", so that I might start my life again at twenty in one of those comfortable rooms among ancient buildings, the walls of which exhaled so strong an atmosphere of the aristocratic tradition, and share in the privileges of an English university. Had I been lucky enough to be admitted to one of them, I really believe that I should have stayed there for ten years. The existence of a French student is nothing but hard work in miserable surroundings: his pleasures are few and far less healthy than those of his English contemporary. There is no escaping the comparison: on one side the aristo-

cratic life, on the other the menial grind of the wood-cutter.

On this state of affairs we had a way of taking our revenge. It was to say—I make no attempt to give the actual words, but I merely subsume the many varieties of the comment under one typical formula—“Oh, no one denies that the English have an easy time of it; they care about nothing but amusing themselves. Only, you see, they know nothing about anything, and are completely stupid. . . .!”

My answer to this was always to quote their achievements in science, in art, and in literature, which can stand comparison with those of any other country in the world. Years later it became my habit to analyse, as far as I was able, the real meaning of the word intelligence. About that I will say more later. Stupid or not stupid, the English, individually or collectively, enjoyed in our eyes an enormous prestige. England was recognized as being a great country in which wealth was far more widely distributed than it was with us, a country where everyone, in his own particular sphere, seemed far more of an *aristocrat* than did his opposite number in France: the workman with his Trade Union, the farmer hunting twice a week, the great noble occupying his leisure with sport and taking his part in the government of the country, the soldier with his rich uniform and his long periods of leave, the sailor unsurpassed by any in the world, finally, the old Queen who formed the wise and brilliant apex to a magnificent hierarchy.

If I lay so much stress on the fact that our respect for, and love of, England was largely due to the aristocratic and traditional nature of its culture, the reason is that I notice with disquiet a tendency among our neighbours to depart from it. I am quite sure that

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the main reason lying behind the liking of the French workman with his socialist leanings for his colleague across the Channel, is this, that he is dazzled by the very qualities in the latter which are most at variance with Labour theory—by the recognition, no less, that the English worker is far nearer to becoming a gentleman than he himself will ever be, that he is a *privileged* being among those who are *apparently* of the same class in other countries. In England, however hard-up the communist worker may be, he always has the comfort of saying to himself—"Civis sum romanus", or, in other words, "I'm an Englishman"—for to be an Englishman is the secret desire of every inhabitant of the British Empire, and Britain, in that sense, has usurped the place of Rome. Such a consummation remains possible so long as Rome does not fall to the position of Carthage, so long, that is, as England, the country of all others organized upon the basis of a hierarchy, does not let itself be eaten up by its working class and its merchants.

CHAPTER THREE

MANHOOD

I HAD managed, while at school, to forget what little I had ever known of modern languages, and, from the age of twelve, had studied nothing but German. Consequently my parents decided to send me to England to learn English. Great was my joy, greater still were my hopes. I imagined that I should be welcomed in one of those wonderful country houses (with which I was so familiar in pictures) surrounded by a vast park and ancient trees. There would be horses and dogs, and I should go riding in the company of charming young girls. . . .

"A heavy fog hung all over the city and in the streets it was very cold, for it was Summer in England."

I think it was Kipling who wrote those words, though I was not to become familiar with them until much later. Doubtless I should have savoured their bitter truth if I had first approached the unknown isle during the fine season. Actually I arrived in late autumn. When I left the west of France the sun was still shining. I went by train to Dieppe, arriving late

in the evening. In darkness and fog I embarked, in darkness and fog I made the crossing, which tried my endurance considerably, and took that other train headed for Victoria, where I arrived in the scarce relieved blackness of an icy dawn. I at once became strongly aware of the mixed smell of smoke and soot which, for the foreigner, is so characteristic of London. I made my way to the "Underground" which was to take me to Richmond, where dwelt the professor who was to initiate me into the beauties of the language of Shakespeare. My enthusiasm was somewhat damped by all this cold and darkness. In spite of the fact that the Underground station at Richmond lacked any pretensions to grandeur, the prestige of Old England was reestablished by the appearance of a hansom to which I confided my trunk, my suitcases and my person, rather nervous at seeing such a weight (to say nothing of the driver) stowed away on the top of a two-wheeled vehicle. It was daylight when I arrived at the address which I had written out and given to the coachman. It was still foggy, and the smell of soot was still in my nostrils. . . .

Mr Watson received me without any very great show of warmth and led me to my room, the window of which gave on to what he called the garden. This was a space of ground, black like everything else in the neighbourhood, measuring about fifteen yards in length and ten in breadth. . . . He would call me, he said, when breakfast was ready. . . . That, I reflected, was when I should meet the family. I knew from letters received that, in addition to Madame, there was a son and two daughters. So far this strange land had not shown me its most smiling aspect. . . . I was summoned; I went down ; I was introduced!

I prepared to make the best of things. I was there,

after all, to learn English, not to have a good time. My professor's method was perfection. He had realized that phonetics are the basis of every language, and he was insistent that I should learn as quickly as possible how to pronounce reasonably well. To achieve this end we would sit together each with a copy of the same book. He would read out a phrase, while I listened, noted, repeated the words after him. We went over and over the same ground until sound, accent, rhythm, were right. The book was an abbreviated version of *She* by Rider Haggard. I still remember the opening sentence of this book, the first five or six pages of which, at the end of a fortnight or so, I could repeat almost perfectly: "This record of one of the most wonderful and mysterious experiences ever undergone by mortal man is written by me, Horace Holly. . . ."

In addition to this, I took notes of, and tried to remember, the largest possible number of words, with their meaning and their pronunciation. After a while I mastered a sort of phonetic alphabet which enabled me to record quickly and efficiently the sounds of the spoken language. The rhythm I marked by a series of vertical and horizontal strokes. The tonic stress was shown by a large acute accent. I was also set a certain amount of written work, but this was considered to be of secondary importance in a system which was almost entirely oral and suited to quite young children. . . . "Except ye become as little children ye shall not enter into the kingdom of . . . the English language", or, let me add, of any language. It is true, I think, to say that unless one knows a language as it is spoken, one will never penetrate to the soul of a people. There have been deaf geniuses, but their number is not great.

The little that I have been able to understand of the

English, among whom I was to live much later in the close intimacy of war, had its origins in my early traffic with the excellent, if not very forthcoming, Mr Watson. Teachers of modern languages ought always to have fine voices, faultless elocution . . . and a good accent! There are many Frenchmen, and French women particularly, who mangle the English tongue simply as a result of imitating the pronunciation of some nurse from Cornwall, Wales, or, most frequently, because she would be a Catholic, from Ireland. The English are just as guilty in their ignorance of how French *sounds*. They are made to learn the meaning of words before their sound. Once, on a Channel steamer, I came across a young English girl who "could speak French". She confessed that she had never been able to distinguish the difference of pronunciation between the words "pleurer" and "pleuvoir". This fact she announced with so incredible an accent that she had to translate, and explain that what she meant was the "difference between to rain and to cry."

The excellent Watson did not confine his lessons to the English tongue. He took me out on the Thames and taught me to row. Few of his French colleagues would have done it nearly so well. My work was not so onerous as to prevent me from making several expeditions, especially to London, where I visited all the chief monuments. I spent three months in England. I wandered all over London and very soon learned to savour the peculiar charm of that great city.

It was a very different place from Paris, where I had been accustomed to live for six months out of every twelve during my childhood and youth. My impressions of the immense city in 1896 are still vivid to-day. Tradition, elegance, ceaseless movement, order,

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and . . . charm. I shall have more to say of it later. It was before the day of motor cars, and what first struck a young Frenchman with admiration was the speed of the hansom-cabs, the smartness of their horses and their drivers, the disciplined traffic of the streets, the unquestioned authority of the policemen, their large size and their good nature, finally the fine appearance of the soldiers in their old-fashioned uniforms.

But so far my acquaintance was only with the outside of English life. Of domestic interiors I knew little, apart from the families of my teacher and a few of his friends. I was soon to be made free of a very different society, frequented by very different persons.

CHAPTER FOUR

BRITISH EGYPT

THE very next year, I had an opportunity of visiting Egypt in the company of a relation. The end of 1897 and the beginning of 1898 came at a period of great importance for the English in the Nile Valley, for the latter date saw Kitchener's recapture of Khartoum from the followers of the Mahdi.

Egypt was beginning to forget the tragic adventure of General Gordon, a soldier who had enjoyed enormous prestige in France. Many educated and idealistic Frenchmen had felt the abandonment of that hero to his fate as a blot on the history of Christendom. There can be little doubt that he was one of those men too far above the average of humanity to be fully understood by his contemporaries. There is a feeling in France that certain English writers have drawn of him what is a caricature rather than a portrait.

Nevertheless, England was profoundly aware of the disgrace which she had incurred in the eyes of the civilized world as a result of the actions of her Ministers in 1885, and was not inclined to forget it. Her virtues

are those of action and obstinacy rather than of logic. No other nation would have given to the world the spectacle of a Gordon avenged under the aegis of a man who had done the least to support him during his lifetime—I mean Lord Cromer.

The greatness which brought about this result comes from being willing to admit when one has been wrong.

We called on Lady Cromer, who knew several members of my family, and there we met her husband. The residence of the British Representative at the court of the Khedive—and this Representative in fact wielded the supreme authority of the country—was a huge, white building, airy and comfortable, surrounded by a lovely garden which ran down to the Nile. There was about the whole house an atmosphere of serenity and conscious strength. One felt that one would have liked to live there, served by magnificent Indians in white and gold, respectful and silent. Sir Evelyn Baring had been made Lord Cromer, an honour he well deserved for the work he had accomplished in the land of the Pharaohs. He was a powerful-looking, fattish man, with rather a red face and light-coloured eyes. He was surrounded by an aura of authority. His manner was at once kindly and insolent. I thought him then, and now, looking back, I think him still, typically English. All his staff spoke excellent French. The house was pleasant, the circle charming. I met there several secretaries and diplomatic attachés, as well as a niece, whose name I have forgotten, and two small boys of about seven or eight, one of whom was to become the present holder of the title.

The English choose their foreign representatives well. They see to it that they are men of the world. Diplomats, officials, soldiers, manufacturers or merchants, these voluntary expatriates are one

and all gentlemen, or strive to be. The contrary is the case in France ever since our country has "enjoyed" a democratic régime. My visit to Egypt gave me the first opportunity of realizing the different meanings of the word *democracy* as it obtains in England and in France. In England it signifies a hierarchy with a Sovereign at its head, a powerful aristocracy constantly renewed and therefore full of vitality, a "gentlemanized" (forgive the barbarism) middle class, and a working population which would like to resemble the middle-class and does its best to live according to middle class standards (as witness the fact that every miner has his "parlour"). In France it stands quite simply for the exploitation (by inferior but greedy individuals) of every base instinct to be found among the masses of every nation, though, despite the seeds of discord which have been carefully sown amongst them, those masses are always ready to unite in the face of any real threat to the country.

One consequence of this state of affairs is that while in England the "superior" man of the world treats his subordinates as though they were of the same quality as himself, with us, the "superior", the man in power, who is usually a parvenu either in the world of politics or of business, behaves to his underlings as to so many flunkys. A second consequence is this, that only those with the souls or characters of servants can hang on to their jobs. A third is that the average well-conditioned Frenchman never consorts with the "French colony" if he can possibly avoid it, but seeks his pleasure in the society of foreigners, more particularly of the English. I have known even the wife of an ambassador who bore out this rule. All of which is but another proof of what I have already stated, that the prestige of the English is primarily a prestige of

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elegance and good upbringing. To that they should cling above all else. I am not quite sure that the word "smartness" altogether meets the case, but I have an idea that one may justly, in this connexion, quote the saying that "Smartness is the first quality of the English". An evening party in the French colony, whether official or not, could be considered elegant only if it contained a goodish number of Englishmen, whether soldiers or civilians! With what an air they carried their dress uniforms! They must have noticed it themselves—to do so demanded no very high degree of intelligence. Besides, it should always be remembered that intelligence must not be confused with good upbringing any more than learning with elegance.

That charming young girl whom I met at Lord Cromer's, the young girl whom I have already mentioned as having come to Cairo for "the Season"—was she intelligent? At that time I was a young Frenchman bubbling over with artistic and intellectual excitement, fresh from the discovery of the wonderful monuments left us by the ancient Egyptians, and of the masterpieces of Arab art, things of which I had dreamed since my earliest years. What visions I had had!—the pyramids, the Sphinx, the Museum (at that time situated in the Palace of Gizeh), with its paintings, its statues, its jewelry, its mummies; with what tranced eyes I was prepared to look upon those other wonders of this new world, mosques inlaid with polygonal marbles, sculptured wood, wrought brass, and copies of the Koran exquisitely bound. But what held me most, in anticipation, was the splendour of the sunlight, the Nile, the desert—all the gorgeous East which now at last I was able to see with my own eyes!

Naturally, I spoke of all these marvels to the young

girl in question (who was about my own age). They seemed to rouse in her no interest whatever. Little by little I discovered that she had never been to the Museum, Gizeh being for her nothing but a place in which to saunter, and as for the Pyramids—"They're over at Mena, aren't they?" she asked (the Mena House was a hotel built on the fringes of the desert, boasting several good tennis courts, and named after the first legendary king of ancient Egypt). Noticing my amazement, Lord Cromer winked a sarcastic eye. "She has not come to Egypt to see its monuments", he said, "but to *dance*!" Comment is needless, thought I, but from that day to this I have never been quite sure whether he was laughing at her or at me. He himself was far from being indifferent to works of art. A lady of our acquaintance was speaking to him one day of the lamentable condition of a certain charming mosque which was fast falling into ruins. "I'll stop them from letting it get worse", he told her; "I've already prevented the demolition of quite a number."

There was at the Embassy a charming Comte de Salis who was much interested in art. His colleagues, so far as I could gather, preferred racing and polo, though they seemed to me to be men of refinement and elegance. I suppose when one lives, as they did, surrounded by masterpieces, one tends to take them for granted.

The Gordon Highlanders were, at that time, in garrison at Cairo, being quartered in the Kasr-en-Nil barracks. I frequently used to stop to watch them drilling on the parade ground, and to admire their fine rhythmic stride as they marched through the streets to the music of the pipes. How efficient these magnificent troops might be in a modern war I did not pretend to know, but I can say without fear of contra-

diction that their kilted officers were irresistible on the dance floor, though I cannot estimate how much of their success with the ladies was due to their picturesque appearance, how much to "sex appeal", how much to their dash and their handsome figures. I doubt whether even the ladies themselves could have done so either, but it is hard to say, for the complexity of their feelings was concealed beneath an appearance of modesty which, if rarely more sincere, was considerably better acted, than anything achieved by their modern sisters.

Now and then I saw the Khedive driving in state through the streets. His impression on me was of a well behaved little boy sitting beside his tutor from the British Legation who seemed constantly to correct him.

I have said that Lord Cromer as seen by a young Frenchman of 1898 was typically English. Some people said that the Barings had originally spelt their name differently, and had been Jewish bankers. Of this I know nothing, and so far as I could see the family had become completely anglicized. Doubtless, if the story were true, the various marriages they had made into the ranks of English society had injected so much purely English blood into their racial strain that the original type had become definitely modified. Naturally, I speak only as one judging by appearances.

Still, I should like, at this point, to make a comparison. The Rothschild family, hailing originally from Frankfurt, established itself in France during the last years of the Napoleonic régime. Their physical appearance, the tones of their voice, their general character led to a number of Frenchmen referring to them as "Youpins". I find it hard to believe that the same word could have been used of a man like Cromer.

Whether this comparison redounds most to the credit of the British race or the Jewish, I hesitate to say.

However that may be, this year, 1898, was to see the death of Gordon avenged by Sir Herbert, rightly renamed, as a result of his victory, Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, and his success was undoubtedly to be regarded as the triumph of the Westerner over the Semite.

At the time I am speaking of, the Egyptians had no love for the English. This state of affairs was the result of the way in which the English treated them—namely, as inferiors who must be dealt with justly and benevolently. Egyptians of the official world were approached, whenever necessity arose, with respect and good manners, but they were never received as equals in society. Otherwise they were ignored, and it was a constant irritation for the educated and Europeanized elements in the native population to feel that the English never really regarded them as being on an equal footing with themselves.

The French, particularly French tourists, were received by several Egyptian princes, such as Izzet Pasha, and were never guilty of this rather scornful attitude. Their tone was one of far greater familiarity, and whenever French and Egyptians met, no matter in what class of society, there was a feeling that all those present were men of the world together.

Many of my compatriots at that time maintained that the Egyptians would have preferred to be under French domination. My own feeling is that "Whoever is our master is our enemy".¹ One always hates most those in whose power one happens to be: that is the long and short of the matter. As for any feeling of friendship for the French, it may have existed

¹ La Fontaine.

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theoretically among certain professors and university students, in whose eyes France stood (three times over, unfortunately) for the spirit of revolution. . . .

Leaving politics aside, I asked several Egyptians who had had dealings with both French and English either in business or in matters of administration, which of the two they preferred. "Neither", was the answer. "The English are ridiculous: they demand an impossible degree of efficiency, and know nothing of oriental justice. The French, on the other hand, are abominably corrupt. They ask for, and exact, far more in the way of bribery than even the Turkish officials! . . ."

The fact is that the type of Frenchman whom we export, is, as a result of our political system and of our overweening love of home, always the worst. I have known it to be held as a black mark against an intending suitor that he had tried to make a career in the Colonies. I am not, of course, speaking of soldiers.

I shall be told, no doubt, that the English exploited the country in their own way, by manipulating at will the price of cotton and sugar cane. This was one of the most serious grievances that the natives had against them. The Egyptian is a born gambler, and when he loses he always tries to lay the blame on some cause that it is beyond his power to control. He believes, as a rule, that it is the English speculator who is at the root of his troubles.

A former official of the Khedive Ismail told me, too, that the English method of doing justice was ridiculous. "In the old days, whenever a crime was committed in some village of Upper Egypt, the Mudir assembled all the leading inhabitants and told them to find the guilty party within twenty-four hours. Someone was always duly provided to receive the bastinado on the

soles of his feet, or to be beheaded according to the gravity of the offence . . . and justice was done! Nowadays, a lawsuit is instigated, witnesses are summoned, speeches are made, and the accused is always acquitted. It is well known that in cases of murder the procedure of the court is always 'rehearsed' more than once, and the witnesses and false witnesses are coached beforehand in what they have to say, with the result that everything is well prepared before ever the case comes to trial, and the judge has no option but to acquit. Lesser crimes are left to shift for themselves. The consequence of all this is that there has been a marked increase in serious offences."

All this apart, life for a European in Egypt in the time of Cromer the First and Abbas Hilmi was extremely pleasant, always assuming that he was not the victim of a morbid Anglophobia. Unfortunately, their excellent régime has been discontinued, and the fellaheen have been given a Parliamentary system (the absurdity of which will at once be obvious to all who know them), a constitution, and a constitutional monarch. The English and the other Europeans will live to regret the change. Theorists always commit the blunder of arguing from the particular to the general. Among the ten million people inhabiting Egypt, there are, concentrated in four or five cities, perhaps ten thousand or so educated persons capable of understanding a representative system of government. Nine-tenths of the population is composed of grown-up children, who, though normally tractable enough, provide a rich seed-ground for every kind of fanaticism.

Regarded from a purely selfish point of view, the régime of Abdul Hamid was the one that offered the pleasantest life for Europeans anywhere in the East.

Europeans (the Turk could never be included in that category) were "taboo". Not a hair of their heads could be touched. One and all they were watched over with secrecy and benevolence. They could sleep tranquilly with their doors and windows wide open. All that has now changed.

In those happy, pre-war days, the Abbas-Cromer dyarchy ensured unbroken peace and a high degree of prosperity. A third "Power", which probably benefited more than any other from the Egyptian experiment, was the organization of Thomas Cook (and Son). It knew to a nicety how to exploit the need felt by many Europeans for dictation. Mr Cook, that great master of irony, subjected the English to the authority of his "dragomans". The prestige enjoyed by the "dragoman" on board one of the Cook steamers had to be experienced to be believed. English women of the proudest lineage would obey him without a murmur. As to the "Bicharis", those brown-skinned, wiry men with handsome faces and well-disguised grubbiness, their conquests were beyond number, (I should like to be able to say that hearts were their only trophies!). They were, I think, easier to deal with, than the young Frenchmen who constantly, in the hotels of Luxor and other places, found themselves playing the scene of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. No one who has not had to resist the ardour of the English woman of mature years, can have any ideas of the lengths to which it will go, or of the effect upon these usually respectable ladies of the wall sculptures of Egypt.

The dragomans of the hotels, of the steamers, of the dahabiahs, as well as the innumerable guides who offered their services to Europeans, were all excessively practical, and insisted on magnificent baksheesh, to say

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nothing of lesser gifts. As to the information which they trotted out in connexion with the monuments of the country, its quality was well suited to that of the tourists who listened to them.

I was lucky enough to make several expeditions by dahabiah, thereby avoiding the prattle of the dragomans. One of these men whom I had taken on for my first long journey confined his activities to the boat, the donkeys and the problem of providing food. He had shown some surprise when I categorically forbade him to say anything about matters of history or archaeology. I noticed, however, that he listened carefully to the discourses to which one of our friends, an eminent Egyptologist, treated us. When I asked whether he was interested in such things, he said no, but that having to tell the tourists something, he could get a great deal of help from what he heard.

I met several other distinguished Englishmen in Egypt quite unconnected with Lord Cromer and his staff.

Early in 1898 I arrived at Assouan. There I had to change boats, since the owner of the dahabiah which had brought us from Cairo refused to run the risk of having his craft manhandled up the rapids—the only method of negotiating them which obtained before the construction of the Assouan dam. It was a dangerous but interesting business, and the dahabiah which we found waiting for us at Assouan went safely through the picturesque ordeal. She was considerably smaller than the one in which we had travelled previously, but a bad sailer.

Our progress through the narrow channel of the Nile above the First Cataract, between vertical walls of rock, was very slow. Still, we did in time reach Korosko where the river makes a bend which necessi-

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tates all boats taking a north-westerly direction. It was precisely from that quarter that the wind had been blowing for some days, varying in strength from moderate to stormy. We reached Korosko in the evening, and spent the whole of the next day hoping for a calm or a change of wind. It is a picturesque place, but its resources of entertainment are soon exhausted. Besides we had not unlimited time at our disposal.

Since there are no saints to invoke in this Mussulman country, we had to make do with the gods, and the concrete divinity to whom we addressed our prayers was Lady Cromer. We sent her an S.O.S. telegram. She was good enough to lend a favourable ear to our appeal, and the local "Mudir" was ordered to give us the necessary assistance. He was uncertain what, exactly, he ought to do . . . although we had grown accustomed to seeing, every day, numerous "gayasses"—huge sailing vessels—negotiating the difficult turn by means of tugs, and then continuing their journey towards Wady Halfa under their own sail.

These "gayasses" were laden to the gunwale with corn, cattle, and provisions of every kind destined for the army marching on Khartoum. The troops of Her Gracious Majesty, and those of the Khedive, must lack for nothing in the way of food during the campaign.

But the heart of the Mudir was torn by conflicting fears—fear of incurring the anger of Sirdar Kitchener on the one hand, and, on the other, that of Lord "Cromère"—as he insisted on pronouncing the name. The first of these had given instructions to the effect that every available tug should be sent up to Wady Halfa with the provision ships; the second had issued a command that we were to be helped round the difficult headland.

Our dragoman had a brilliant idea which he im-

parted to the Mudir. What he suggested was the middle way, a means of combining the two imperatives. The first tug leaving for the south should take in tow—
1. a cattle boat (for the Sirdar); 2. our little dahabiah (in deference to the wishes of Lord Cromer). In this way, lashed gunwale to gunwale with a load of cattle, we were enabled to negotiate the troublesome bend.

Lady Cromer had been good enough to give us an introduction to Colonel Maxwell, who was in command of the "fortified zone" of Wady Halfa. As soon as we arrived at this harbour (now on a war footing), we found ourselves in the area of military operations. The actual troops, however, had already pushed beyond Dongola.

We reported at the camp and were hospitably received by a charming "boy orficer" (to employ Mulvaney's phrase), all shyness and stammer . . . Stammering was already a tradition in the British Army, and it has continued to the present day. The Colonel was absent on a tour of inspection of the Sirdar's troops, he told us, but he would be only too glad to forward to him any message we liked to send. As to the wish we expressed to continue our journey towards the south, "he couldn't express any opinion on the subject." (Our ambition was to be the first non-combatants to reach Dongola. We had left the Greek pedlars out of our reckoning.)

Half an hour later, in a narrow lane flanked by white walls, beneath a torrid sun and an icy wind which shook grey dust down upon our heads from the branches of the palm trees, we had to draw aside to give passage to a detachment of mounted men. It was the Sirdar, with Colonel Maxwell, who so far knew nothing about us, and several other officers.

Next morning, we had scarcely finished breakfast

on board our old tub, when an Arab sailor announced in an excited voice that "ouahed Bacha"—a Pasha—wanted to speak to us. It was the excellent Maxwell returning our call. All smiles, very red in the face, rather fat, with that jolly air common to all healthy Englishmen, he put himself entirely at our disposition, saying that "he was ready to do all in his power to be helpful". . . . But Wady Halfa, he added, was a pretty unattractive hole. Nothing to see there, except perhaps the view from the Abusir rocks from which we could command a goodish part of the Cataract—not that that was particularly thrilling, "just a lot of stones and a bit of water". Dongola?—Alas, quite impossible. He had orders to keep anybody not connected with the army from proceeding in that direction. . . . Operations were pending. . . . The Sirdar, as a matter of fact, had just gone up by train. . . . The use of the railway would depend on the progress of the troops . . . and . . .

"I should have returned your call earlier but for a "petit accidong" (his French accent was most engaging). "Ouii le wagonne de Sir Herbert a prii le feu! Ouii j'aie dou loui donner tout mon kit, meme mai chemises!"

This gift of shirts to Sirdar Kitchener by Colonel Maxwell would doubtless have remained one of those obscure acts of heroism which find no mention in the records of history, but for this monument which I here raise to the gallant officer. The recipient of his charity soon forgot all about the matter, and it fell to me, some years later, to remind him of it.

In concluding this account of my first visit to Egypt, let me say that no pleasanter fate could have befallen an inhabitant of this planet than to find himself in the position of a European residing in Egypt, on the one

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hand subjected to British authority, and, on the other, served by kindly, well-disciplined, "native" officials. In such a situation he would have savoured what must have been the solid comfort of the "Roman Citizen" under the Empire, whether in Europe, in Asia or in Africa.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE YEARS BEFORE THE WAR

I PAID several other visits to Egypt, but they did nothing to deepen my knowledge of the English. A little later I was to see a good deal more of them, in their own country, on the occasion of a six weeks' holiday which I spent in the charming little village of Lyndhurst in the heart of the New Forest.

I am convinced that life in a small country town in the reign of Edward VII gave, as nothing else could do, an idea of the "*aurea mediocritas*" spoken of by Horace. These little English towns seem built for pleasure. In the first place, the art of designing attractive and individual small houses has been carried to a very high degree of excellence. These diminutive homes are thoroughly up to date in the matter of conveniences—or seemed to be so then, though they have perhaps not kept pace with modern standards. Many parts of England with which I made acquaintance at that time, appeared to be inhabited exclusively by members of a numerically huge middle class, who were well-off without being rich, and could boast a

small income which they had amassed without unduly strenuous efforts. The glory of the English system lies in the number of sinecures, of half and quarter sinecures, which can be enjoyed by those who are part of the machine. Each contributes something to the whole structure. It is not too much to say that this system, which reached its highest point of development during the last half of the nineteenth century and in the first years of the twentieth, is one of the triumphs of history. Must one become reconciled to the fact that, in this respect, the war of 1914-1918 was the "end of a chapter"? The real problem is—will this social hierarchy, access to which is, more often than not, open to merit, endure? One should always remember where England is concerned, that it is safer to speak of what one has seen than of what will—or may—happen.

Round about the year of grace 1903, the general structure of this "system", then at its height, might be epitomized as a vast network of commerce, both sea- and land-borne, which put into general circulation the products of industry partly English in origin, partly swelled by articles more or less manufactured in every country of the globe. But for this commerce to be successful, there had to be tens of millions of men and women with skins of various colours, generically known as "natives", as well as an almost equal number of white folk, roughly grouped under the vaguely contemptuous term "Continental", all of whom, throughout the inhabited world, were willing to work for the benefit of a lazy and decaying Britain. Lazy? It would need a brave man to say that. Didn't numerous well-built gentlemen arrive as early as 9 a.m. in their comfortable offices, after having braved the heat and cold of railway stations? Shedding their panoply (overcoat, umbrella, top-hat), they marched, full of

energy and determination, into handsome rooms furnished in oak or mahogany. Their hearts full of courage, they advanced the few steps necessary to bring them within reach of the match-box. That done, with undiminished energy, the particular hero would light a cigarette, a cigar or a pipe, with fingers that showed no sign of trembling, as a preliminary to seating himself at a desk on which lay a small pile of typewritten sheets. At this point he would relax for a moment to call Heaven to witness the superhuman nature of the tasks before him, compared to which those of Hercules were as nothing. In response to a bell a secretary would appear, a squire almost as hardy as his knight, bearing an armful of papers. Then would begin the battle of black and white, and continue perhaps until one o'clock with intervals for reading or conversation.

When finally the foe had measured his length on the ground, when, at long last, the pen had conquered the paper, the knight-errant would give vent to a great sigh. With a high-spirited gesture he would rise in a single movement, his hands pressed firmly upon the seat of tribulation. Exhausted, but with heart still high, he would collapse into the embrace of an enormous leather armchair. Hurriedly he would complete his reading of the day's news. During his first cigar he had taken but a preliminary "canter" through the papers.

In these prehistoric days, the telephone had already arrived to trouble such well-earned repose. A few brief monosyllables would soon put an end to this new contest (conducted, this time, at the end of a wire). . . . But Time that waits for no man. . . . "Sed fugit interea . . . fugit irreparabile tempus."

There are limits to human endurance. No matter how exhausting these epic deeds might have been, the panoply had to be assumed once more, top-hat, over-

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coat, umbrella, and the doughty warrior, with steps still firm and eloquent of vigour, would reach his club, luncheon, and a further period of rest in another, but still leather, armchair.

The afternoon would see one more lance broken, a second battle undertaken—this time with a meagre half-hour's interval for tea, until such time as the solemn hour should sound calling our hero back to his family—I very nearly wrote conjugal—duties.

Don't forget that the brave man had presumably "kept a gentleman's hours" and that, at the end of his tether, he had dropped into a doze after that well-deserved luncheon—which explains the necessity for the restorative cup of tea.

In those days the fine fellows thus broken by their labours could be numbered by tens of thousands in the length and breadth of the United Kingdom (not quite so united as it had been!).

Such was the strength of the system, so undoubted its efficiency, that it survived even the war. I remember asking a dear friend, "somewhere in Flanders", how he managed to fill his day—he belonged to that fine fighting body the A.S.C. . . .

"Office work, old man", he replied with a wink: and, when I asked him what his hours were:

"Six to six-five p.m., every day"—but I think he was exaggerating a bit.

Laugh if you like, but this kind of exhausting labour is so well spaced out over the population that it makes it possible—working upwards from the lowest rung in the social ladder—for millions of artisans to have neat little cottages, complete with parlours, carpets and curtains; for several hundred thousand to have rather grander houses and employ a housemaid; and for a few thousands to possess magnificent residences run

by well-trained servants and luxurious offices furnished in leather and mahogany. The first of these categories play football, the second tennis, while the third have two or three hunters apiece and a yacht. (I have deliberately simplified the picture.)

If their leisure and their comfort differ in degree, the members of all three classes claim the same right of participating, through the medium of the ballot box, in the government of their country. In every known community elections are primarily a matter of money. So long as the upholders of the existing order can command enough to ensure a majority in their interest, matters may still go well in England, always assuming that parliamentary elections are not the only things that matter, that over and above the House of Commons there is still a King and a House of Lords.

In the happy days of which I am writing, "invidia" was as yet scarcely known. It seemed to be universally admitted that everyone should be contented in his own particular sphere of life. And, so far as a foreigner could judge, almost everyone was. Good humour—that test of social solidarity—was widespread. England during the early nineteen hundreds was an aristocratic and hierarchic republic of epicureans, with an hereditary monarch at its head, based firmly on tradition, commerce and sport.

I do not undertake to produce an exact French translation of the English word "sport". To attach to it the implication of physical pleasure—all sexual significance, of course, being absent—is not to translate it, but to express part of its meaning.

Sport, as it is understood in all modern countries, is essentially an English invention. But nowhere except in England does it form an integral part of the very life of the people. It is exceedingly rare in England to

find a man who has not some favourite sport, while in France, the reverse is the case.

Sport has given rise to the "sporting spirit"—something that it is harder to graft on to the existence of other nations than sport itself. The "sporting spirit" creates a form of patriotic solidarity. The loss of the America Cup was a matter almost for national mourning. It never occurred to the English to feel indignation when, in 1914, the total amount of money spent on sport was found to equal half of that devoted to the upkeep of the Navy.

The most noticeable thing about the "sporting spirit" is that it implies a desire to give the "other fellow" a fair chance. One does not hit a man when he's down: one does not shoot a sitting bird.

It should be unnecessary to add that sport is a pleasure involving energy and activity. Effort, if not actual danger, is an essential part of it.

True to the teaching of the Epicureans, every Englishman cultivates the pleasure in which he takes most delight, the vice which appeals to him, the mania (hobby) of his choice. And since every Englishman accords to his neighbour perfect liberty of action so far as these three points are concerned, everyone is happy. With a curious faculty for respecting the will of the majority, and thereby giving the appearance of being democratic, he combines a feeling for independence and liberty which is a sign of aristocracy.

The success to which I referred in describing the English social system, reached its apogee about the middle of Queen Victoria's reign. At the time of the South African war signs of instability became visible, and these have persisted ever since. It weathered the storm, however, up to 1914.

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hatred felt for Austria by the French Radicals, which was nothing less, in fact, than a hatred of monarchy and Catholicism? A firm "No" on the part of England would have successfully prevented the cabal which at that time directed the destinies of France from siding with the Serbs. The whole business might have been confined to Austria-Hungary and Germany on the one side, and Russia on the other. . . . (But what really frightened the English was the idea of a trade drive on the part of an Austro-German combination towards Salonica. . . .)

Were the results obtained worth the massacre of 1914-1918? . . . England, France (and Italy) would have been irresistible after a war which would have left Russia and the Austro-German alliance in a state of exhaustion.

But what is the use of bemoaning what men's foolishness has brought about, when it is quite obvious that they are only too ready to start the whole business over again?¹

We have travelled a long way from Lyndhurst and August 1903! Life there was easy, peaceful, cheap. There was an abundance of everything, and at very low cost. The people were charming. The teaching of Epicurus triumphed to an accompaniment of tennis, cricket, golf and hunting.

There were two packs—fox-hounds and deer-hounds. The latter appealed to me particularly, since I had indulged in the sport at home, especially in that of stag and buck hunting which it is not unlike.

The English method is less expert than ours, but the sport is far more highly organized than it is in France. It gave one a good opportunity of realizing the "superiority of the Anglo-Saxon". I am not

¹ Written in 1938.

joking. All honest men will admit that the proper organization of pleasure is the chief end of existence. To ensure that "les Plaisirs et les Jeux"¹ (to quote G. Duhamel) shall be well organized, it is essential that everyone be in agreement, and convinced that organization is to their own personal advantage. In what I am about to say, I am deliberately generalizing.

In this, as in other things, the English stand for unity, the French for division. There is the additional fact to be considered, that in France "Public Bodies" always and everywhere supply the principle of fermentation where class hatred is concerned. Consequently the "sound elector" always has an advantage in any trial arising out of matters connected with hunting, or in any claim for damages caused by hounds, or deriving from the preservation of game. Such matters, in England, are settled amicably between the "Hunt Secretary" and the interested parties. In France the transaction becomes a matter of official forms and sworn affidavits. Claiming for "damage done by game" is, with us, a regular industry. It is only necessary to plant a row of cabbages or beet along the edge of a wood, and sooner or later they are bound to be eaten by animals, large or small, deliberately preserved for purposes of sport. Payment in full for the first crop is certain (after a lawsuit, if possible): and for the second crop too. The yield of any given piece of land may well be magnificent, since the farmer, in this way, can be sure of getting the price of two crops instead of one.

But the evil goes deeper still. In France it is a matter of principle that the control of hunting and shooting shall be, above all things, run on democratic

¹ A play on the title of Proust's early book, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*.
Translator's note.

lines. Consequently the cost of licences is kept so low that it acts as no sort of deterrent to the mere "destroyer of game". I use the word deliberately, for the average Frenchman is entirely lacking in the sporting spirit. Most village sportsmen think nothing of destroying a whole covey of sitting partridges with a single shot. Hares are invariably killed in their forms, and, where possible, at point-blank range. Furthermore, poaching of all kinds is sure of being treated leniently by the Courts. The general result of all this is that there is scarcely any game left on the ordinary country estate, while in the south, even the small birds are rapidly vanishing. It is a common sight to see the local police standing about with paternal smiles in the middle of a market where finches and nightingales are being openly offered for sale in bundles, and even buying a few themselves for the family pot, though the shooting of small birds is forbidden by law!

Another consequence of this attitude of the authorities, especially where hunting is concerned, is that those who wish to preserve animals for the purpose encourage a quite abnormal birth-rate. This is disastrous from the Hunt's point of view, for sport is never so good where there is an excess of "finds", and hounds are being always distracted by a multiplicity of scents, as when they can be sure of a few good runs over a wide extent of country.

One final grievance. In order to keep out the "destroyers" of his game, the landlord intent on preserving game has adopted the custom of surrounding his estate with a regular trench-system of barbed wire. In parts of France which used to provide magnificent hunting country, riders to hounds can do little more, nowadays, than follow clearly marked tracks between fields bristling with wire.

England organizes these matters quite differently. Hunting there is, admittedly, an artificial sport, but it is still regarded as essentially a pleasure. It is odd, when one comes to think of it, that fences, hedges, banks and walls, intended to keep cattle from wandering, should be regarded as desirable obstacles by riders to hounds. For a great part of the year barbed wire is used to protect the fences from the cattle, the wire being taken down at the opening of the "season". All this is very artificial, as is the custom of preserving on one and the same estate, foxes, partridges and pheasants. But the result, all the same, is that great pleasure is afforded to a great number of people.

In nothing do the English show themselves wiser than in this search for, and cultivation of, pleasure, of the happy life in its various manifestations. They carry this wisdom still further in surrounding the real purpose of life with a cloud of magnificent verbiage, high principles, and moral taboos. We have more or less got out of the way, in France, of using high-sounding words, but most of us realize that such embellishments added a great deal of pleasure to social existence, and that, after all, is the aim of all human groups. The chief virtue that emerges from this admirable and extremely self-conscious epicureanism, is national solidarity. The England I am describing was a society organized for pleasure. Each individual contributed to, and benefited from it, whether he were farmer, labourer, simple tradesman, great employer, banker, or landed proprietor.

The Master of the "New Forest Deer Hounds" and his Huntsman, were invariably mounted on fine grey horses. Neither of them seemed to me to be very deeply versed in the lore of the sport. They used a pack of fox-hounds, not very well chosen for scent—

though I realize that one can't hunt under perfect conditions when the field consists of several hundred excited riders.

What surprised me most in this land of courageous, though often inexperienced horsemen, was to find the Master, admirably mounted though he was, refusing to jump ditches which I negotiated without hesitation on my hired hack. . . . "The reason why I cannot tell". . . .

When I was out one day with the "New Forest Hounds" under the mastership of the delightful Henry Compton, I witnessed a very unusual and curious incident. Hounds suddenly picked up a new scent and found themselves, at the end of the run, confronted by one of the half wild ponies that range the forest. The date was the 10th September, 1903. I wonder whether there is any record of it in the Hunt annals?

There can be no doubt that the English have an acute sense of humour—*Punch* gives plenty of evidence of this—but individually they are not very susceptible to the ridiculous. Maybe they don't particularly care. The turn-out of the New Forest riders was an example of what I mean. Some of the younger people, it is true, were as carefully dressed as though they had been in the Melton-Mowbray or Market Harborough country, but others looked as though they were starting out for a game of golf. The former rode carefully-groomed hunters, the latter were mounted on ponies of every degree of shagginess. Between these two extremes there was every variety of horseman, horsewoman, and mount. I remember a most respectable old gentleman who sported a white suit and a panama hat, while the grey Arab which he rode had a long mane and a tail that swept the ground. A certain

couple, whose name I could never remember, but whom I called "Mr and Mrs Chocolate", were both dressed entirely in the colour of that admirable beverage—and their horses followed suit. One enormous, red-faced woman appeared mounted on a minute pony, while there was a parson, looking as serious as a Pope (could anything be more incongruous?), whose horse was as gloomy-looking as himself.

One group of riders was following and urging on one or two hounds who had missed the scent. Several children were galloping about like mad things. There were very few properly turned out riders, but everyone was having a thoroughly good time except the Master who, most of the time, seemed to be in a bad temper.

Nearly all the people whom we met in the hunting field were extremely kind, although we did not really know them. Having noticed that I carried nothing but a simple stick (in France, no one who is not a regular member of a Hunt sports a crop with lash attached), Mr Justice (afterwards Lord) Darling, sent me a magnificent crop complete with lash, which I still have. If he reads this, I hope he will realize that I still feel a lively sense of gratitude.¹

I was quite "bowled over" by this simple, easy-going life of sport. The wild landscapes of the New Forest are magnificent. (What a lovely and permanent thing is this "new" forest created by William the Conqueror.) I thought seriously of settling there for good. A small property consisting of a wooded hill with an early nineteenth-century house was for sale. It was entirely surrounded by heath which, being Crown land, could never be built over. I was a fool not to make the decision. At that time the pound was worth

¹ Alas for the author's hopes. Lord Darling died in 1936. Translator's note.

twenty-five francs; all payments were made in gold, because everyone had gold. The franc, strictly speaking, no longer exists, and the pound has abandoned the gold standard. Still, even so, I should have been the possessor of a pleasant house, easy to run, and a small park.

What would such a "colonial" life have been like? The word is, perhaps, not very exact, but it is not altogether inappropriate, since it serves to describe a kind of existence entirely unlike any known to the real Europeans of the Continent. One and all, with the exception of the Russians and the Turks, who are Asiatics, share in common certain ways of behaviour and of looking at things. The English are different. I am not denying that what Lord Salisbury, with justifiable pride, called "splendid isolation", may not be an excellent thing for them: I am concerned merely with pointing out that it makes them different from the general run of Europeans.

No young Frenchman who loved sport could have failed to fall a victim to the infinite charm, the exquisite ease of life, which was the lot of the average Englishman of those days. This charm (it really is the only word to express what I mean) of English life is still a reality, though to a lesser extent than formerly. It has diminished in exact ratio to the growth in the British Isles of democracy—which is not at all the same thing as the happiness of the people—and by democracy I mean what we French understand by the term.

English life is materially complicated, intellectually simple. . . . "Blessed are the Simple." Its material complexity is made up of numberless details, ranging from the handling of a piece of toast to the proper use of a racket, which end by filling every moment of the day (even English cooking, in itself extremely simple,

has become an artificial and excessively complicated process). The result of all this is that no one has time just to *think*. As in the monastic life a strict rule keeps the monk constantly occupied so that he shall have no time to let his mind wander, so in England, the gentleman has, so to speak, every movement ordained in advance, and every thought. He *knows* what a gentleman ought to think on any given subject; consequently, there is no point in bothering his brain with thought or discussion. Discussion itself has become, for him, a matter of conventional give and take. During the war I used to listen with much amusement to my English colleagues discussing agricultural problems with much seriousness and a profound respect for the rules of the game.

The Englishman's life is like a tram which is constructed to run only on rails. To change direction is a serious matter—far too serious to contemplate for a moment—why, it would involve the use of a turn-table! The Frenchman, on the other hand, is a natural anarchist. Put him on a set of rails, and his only thought is how to get off them at the earliest possible moment, even at the risk of killing himself in the process. This attitude accounts for the whole of French history since the eighteenth century. But many outside influences have contributed to derail my countrymen. More than anyone else the English have helped on the good work, for the simple reason that they wanted the trams of Europe to run on *their* rails—where such accidents do not occur.

The system which I here designate as a set of rails has the effect of narrowing the outlook of the ordinary middle-class Englishman. There are outstanding individuals, of course, who are not thus conditioned. In England, as elsewhere, they form the element of the

population which is least troubled by prejudice. The less fortunate deny this, but then what they call prejudices are merely certain principles and certain habits of life, which the other classes of the community cannot imitate.

The "middle-class" Englishman cannot understand why it is that a Frenchman puts his hands on the table instead of keeping them hidden beneath it; why it is that he lays his fork on his plate in a particular way; why he gesticulates with his hands instead of making movements with his head; why, in short, he does not eat, drink, and play exactly like an Englishman.

These last three general rules of English life are easy enough to adopt, and that done, the rest comes readily enough. To control his body correctly, to adopt the attitudes, the movements, etc., demanded by English custom, is the first lesson that a foreigner should learn if he is to live happily in England. The body once subdued, the mind quickly follows suit, so true is it that "the body alone really exists: the soul being merely an invention of the Sorbonne."¹

I have been led on to consider the way of life which a young Frenchman in England would have had to adopt. Let me conclude by saying that he would have found no difficulty in submitting to the English discipline—particularly if he had been of the age to go to Eton or Oxford, and in any case if he had been under thirty—because such discipline would have ensured him the greatest possible amount of pleasurable and easy living.

Whatever his taste for learning, and assuming him to be a case of "mens sana in corpore sano", the ordinary well-conditioned young man tends more naturally to fit into a system which elevates recreation into a duty

¹ Rémy de Gourmont, *Lettres à l'Amazone*.

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than into one which makes intellectual work a recreation. It is more amusing, and easier, to win a race than to hand in the best set of Latin verses . . . at least, when one is eighteen. At sixty-six the reverse may be true. But it is rare to find a man who is old before he is young, and the habit of *physical* is more easily retained than that of *mental*, sprinting.

I know perfectly well that I should have found no difficulty in adopting the life of exquisite bodily activity combined with moderate intellectual effort, which is the rule, not only for the young, but for men of all ages, across the Channel. It is the fine flower of perfect wisdom, and few countries can give so admirable an example of the child mind carried into later life.

This education based on pleasure has the advantage of being many-faceted. By that I mean that its varieties depend upon the number of guineas in any given annual income. Thus, above a certain financial level one has a yacht of three hundred tons or over, or, at one degree lower in the scale, of thirty to three hundred. At a point considerably further down the social scale will come the "eighteen foot sail boat", and, lowest of all, the "Canadian canoe". Thousands of persons interested in yachting know how to discuss with considerable technical skill the best lines for a "cutter"—which is a much more sensible occupation than trying to reform the world.

The political blunders of recent years have been due to the fact that, instead of confining their interest to the "Varsity Boat-Race" or to "The Derby" at Epsom, certain persons who had been told that their fellow countrymen were set, at one time, on "civilizing" the Chinese by means of opium, were unwilling to admit that others might have a perfect right to civilize the Abyssinians in other ways. This abandonment of the

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sane traditions of a "muscular epicureanism" rather than of a "muscular Christianity" might well have led Europe into irreparable disaster.

I do not know whether there are any "Little Englanders" now, but I am certain that cricket matches still draw their enthusiastic crowds, and that it is these crowds that will save England. I remember, a long time ago, going to see a play called *The Prisoner of Zenda*, in which the chief part was played by George Alexander. A certain foreign sovereign was, in one scene, receiving the diplomatic corps accredited to his court, and took the occasion to discuss with the ambassadors matters of high moment, and to ask them for news from their various countries. When it came to the turn of the English representative, His Majesty asked, apologetically, for news of any outstanding events which had recently occurred in the British Empire. His Excellency's reply, delivered with immense gravity, was—"Oxford has won the Boat-Race" (that being the chief incident of the week). The whole theatre broke into thunderous applause; the ambassador had made a thoroughly English answer. He was a sensible man. There will always be more than sufficient busybodies trying to fish in the troubled waters of diplomacy in the hope of landing something to the disadvantage of the magnificently calm British outlook.

"The Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton"¹. . . . Eton, Harrow, the other public schools, Oxford and Cambridge, these are the columns on which the British Empire is reared. So long as that Empire is governed by men from the public

¹ According to a book called *The Du Mauriers* published in 1937, it appears that the Battle of Waterloo was actually won in the bed of a certain Mrs Clarke. Whether that is the orthodox view of the matter, I am not in a position to say.

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schools and the universities, so long as the people of Britain have confidence in its ruling class, just so long will Britain remain supreme . . . and just so long will the English, taken individually, be the happiest people on the face of the earth.

I have had no experience of the public schools, but I did pay a visit to the two great universities, though too late, unfortunately, to be entered as a student at either. . . . Residence there must be a paradise of learning and sport. What a wonderful thing it would have been, in the same year, to ride in a "point to point", read the texts of the Greek and Latin writers in the loveliest libraries of the world, to row, perhaps, in a university "eight", to hear eloquent lecturers, to enjoy the Sonnets of Shakespeare stretched on superb lawns beneath century-old trees and surrounded by the architecture of a bygone age, to eat off ancient plate . . . without a care or anxiety in the world, confident in the future; to enjoy, in short, an epicureanism which I could have made at will both muscular and intellectual. . . .

Doubtless you will interrupt my ecstasies with the question—"and what about women, young Frenchman?" Well, that is another story. As a true child of my country I know that life without love is not worth living. But if love is the concern of youth, it has no place in boyhood, and for me, as for others, the happy existence of an undergraduate at Oxford or Cambridge would (almost certainly) have meant a prolongation of the years of boyhood.

I do not know, even yet, what meaning the Englishman attaches to the word love. It would be easier for me to speak for the English woman. Can the one be judged by the other? When in doubt, says the Sage, refrain. Let me merely add this, that if I had passed

several years within the walls of one of those beloved universities, after a formative period in one of the public schools, I should be able to say precisely how the English of my day obeyed or disobeyed the Sixth Commandment, or how they got round it. The problem is far from being a simple one. It never is, in any country. There is more than one Dorian Gray in the United Kingdom, and masculine beauty is more frequent there than anywhere else in the world. It is true also, that many a fine young fellow of twenty-eight or thirty goes virgin to the marriage bed, and "knows"—in the Biblical sense of the word—but one woman in the whole course of his life.

My own opinion is that the man or the woman who fails to explore all the faculties of delight with which God has endowed the human body, is guilty of a crime towards the Creator. At the same time, it is only fair to admit that Philémon and Baucis were perfectly in order so far as this matter is concerned. This book of mine is a collection of impressions, not a treatise on sexual morality.

To return to the universities—is life there compatible with passion? Can a male and female student combine love and learning in the manner of Héloïse and Abélard before his unfortunate accident? That certainly would be the ideal, but I doubt whether it can be realized.

Before concluding this account of my contacts with the English before the war, let me relate briefly an incident which occurred in Cairo whither I returned in 1911-12. Lord Cromer was no longer there. Sir Herbert had become Lord Kitchener of Khartoum and a Field-Marshal. At the time I am speaking of he was British Resident. Colonel Maxwell, if I remember rightly, had been promoted General, and

was Sirdar. I was asked to dinner at the French Embassy to meet these two famous men.

Lord Kitchener, very upright and very stiff, had the height and the breadth of shoulder of a giant. His eyes were a remarkable light blue. He seemed shy, and blushed as he entered the drawing-room. Since this abnormally big man was wearing across his breast the broad sky-blue ribbon of some Order the name of which I have forgotten, he looked like some innocent "Enfant de Marie". It was all very amusing. General Maxwell was a large, red-faced, kindly man. This Good Samaritan, this disciple of St Martin, had probably long forgotten all about those shirts of his at Wady Halfa. He burst into a loud guffaw when he heard me say to Lord Kitchener—"You must, sir, owe a debt of lasting gratitude to General Maxwell."

"Why?" asked the Field-Marshal, opening his great blue eyes wider than usual, and looking first at one, then at the other of us.

"For having given you all he had, down to his last shirt at Wady Halfa in 1898, when your baggage waggon had caught fire. . . ."

The idea that a Frenchman should know this detail caused the Field-Marshal's already scarlet face to glow with still deeper colour. He uttered a sort of groan.

"Oh", interrupted Maxwell, "he is far too ungrateful to have remembered a thing like that. . . ."

No one, at that time, was dreaming of the next "last" war, nor was there any premonition in that company of the tragic death of Lord Kitchener as the result of a mysterious explosion on board a man-of-war in 1916. No one could have guessed that the good-natured Maxwell would have to put down an Irish insurrection by force of arms. . . .

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The year 1913 passed gaily enough for any Frenchman who knew how to savour the delights of living. Ruin was to come on the world in 1914, just because a Serb was taken with the idea of murdering the Archduke Francis Ferdinand.

CHAPTER SIX

PRELUDE TO MASSACRE

IT may not be true to say that our friends and allies had it in their power to impose peace on the world at the time when the political horizon of Europe was darkening as a result of the crime to which I have just referred, but it is worth while to quote the views of an Englishman on the subject:

*It seems now absolutely certain that if, in July 1914, Great Britain, as urged Lord Roberts, had had a million trained and well-equipped men at her disposal, and in response to the French President's urgent appeal, had stated definitely that in the event of an attack by Germany on France she would support the latter with her entire strength, the outbreak of war would have been averted.*¹

The opinion of nine out of ten Frenchmen, speaking without exact knowledge of the military situation as it was at the time, is simpler still, and may be expressed in some such phrase as this—"If England had spoken her mind, the war would never have taken place."

Be that as it may, England did decide, though too

¹ "British Policy Since the Great War." By F. A. W. Gisborne. *National Review*, 1938.

late for our taste. From the moment of her decision, however, she was quite convinced, both of her ultimate success, and . . . the probable duration of hostilities. From the month of September onwards, the British authorities made no bones about leasing buildings and ground for a period of three years. What were England's war aims? To us Frenchmen they seemed complicated. So far as we could understand the situation, the first preoccupation of our neighbour was to avoid having a "pistol levelled at her heart"—a danger which would have become real and pressing had the Germans succeeded in occupying the French and Belgian coasts. In the second place, she wanted to take the opportunity of destroying German maritime competition which had become a definite threat; in the third, she wished to profit by the occasion to occupy the few remaining territories necessary to ensure her the complete control of the Cape to Cairo Railway.

Certain English statesmen did, it is true, hesitate when confronted by the anti-monarchical position taken up by a large section of the French press, and by more than one of our politicians. Were any of them far-sighted enough to discern the sectarian hatred felt by many of these latter for that keystone of Europe, the Austrian Empire? This hatred was not manifested openly until a good deal later, when, in 1917, the Austrian Emperor, through the good offices of Prince Sixte de Bourbon, his brother-in-law, made to France an offer of a separate peace. What the Emperor Charles offered in his letter of 24th March, 1917, may be summarized as follows: (1) To support all the French claims in respect of Alsace-Lorraine. (2) To do all he could to reestablish the complete independence of Belgium. (3) Similarly, to restore, under certain conditions, the full sovereignty of Serbia, and

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even to assure her a fair and natural means of access to the Adriatic. The demands made by Italy could be discussed only when France, England, and Russia should have decided to conclude peace with Austria. In order to make a general peace possible, the Austrian Emperor even went so far as to consider the cession of Galicia to Germany as some compensation for her surrender of Alsace-Lorraine to France. (See the letter of the Emperor Charles to the Crown Prince, dated 20th August, 1917.) It is matter of general knowledge that Poincaré, Lloyd George and Briand all attached considerable importance to these negotiations. But a new President of the Council, Monsieur Ribot, had recently come into power, and it was entirely owing to him that they broke down. The price of this failure for France was the loss of three hundred thousand lives, and the disappearance into thin air of a hundred milliards of francs. It should be easy to establish comparable figures for England.¹

I ask my reader's pardon for thus anticipating the course of events. My object in doing so is merely to bring to the attention of those Englishmen and Frenchmen who do not know them, certain facts which explain the change in the French official attitude towards the Anschluss and the Sudeten question. These facts have served to confirm many Frenchmen in a belief that a sectarian hatred for a monarchical and catholic country was the sole reason for Europe being plunged into a series of irreparable disasters.

To return to 1914. "Malherbe arrived at last." The British Army arrived at last—that "contemptible little army" as the Germans called it.

No sooner had they arrived among us than the

¹ For further details, see Prince Sixte de Bourbon: "Austria's Offer of a Separate Peace." Paris: Plon, 1920.

British troops caused a sensation as much by their elegance as by their demeanour under fire.

Not that criticism was absent. The French military authorities were not sparing in their comments, but there was in their strictures a good deal of jealousy and no little amount of admiration. What a fine lot of fellows they were, these "smart" English soldiers who believed that they had seen angels at the Battle of Mons!—how well turned-out their brown-clad officers, all khaki and polished leather. They looked so well, that the whole world has taken to copying their khaki, their leggings, their puttees, and, in particular, their Sam Browne belts. You remember the prestige enjoyed all over the Ancient World by the "well-greaved" Greeks? Well, you, my dear English friends, are the well-greaved Greeks of to-day, with your elegant uniforms which never, perhaps, looked better than when they were shabby with long wear. Do not smile, I beg you, when I say that your sartorial pre-eminence played no small part in your general success. Speaking generally, you are the most aristocratic race in the whole world—never forget it—and the race whose physical shortcomings are an actual advantage from the tailor's point of view. (Cf. the remark made by an English bootmaker: "Fine leg, sir! Quite the same from top to bottom!")

It may be thought that I insist overmuch on British fashions in clothes. But, after all, it is no small thing to impose a standard on the rest of the globe. Besides, it is so true that the habit makes the monk, that to dress like an Englishman ensures one the sympathy of more than the tailoring fraternity. Nietzsche speaks of the "Standards of the Masters". Is there not also a morality of the well-dressed, and particularly of those who are all dressed alike?

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The splendid little British Army—always late, as our specialists complained—showed up well in the first bloody engagements. Then the line became stabilized. The French had lost fifty per cent. of the effectives of about fifteen Army Corps. I hope I shall be forgiven for giving the gist of what more than one independent-minded Frenchman thought about it all—since that is the main object of this book. After the Marne honour had been satisfied on both sides—there had been a terrific, an irresistible, German offensive, an admirable Allied recovery and counter-attack. At that moment Europe might have been saved and the Russians driven back into their steppes. Italy would have been only too glad to serve as an intermediary. France, the Germanies, Italy, these three were still all that really mattered in Europe. The English are outsiders. They are English first and foremost, and their insularity is as much psychological as physical. They, and those super-isolationists, whom we know as Americans, would probably have been drawn closer together. Europe would have needed them no longer, and the plague of Bolshevism which is a far graver danger than the war ever was, would have been avoided. A statesman with a real feeling for Europe might have realized that. Unfortunately, we had no statesman but only politicians.

“Quos vult perdere Jupiter dementat.” The ancient proverb is as true to-day as it ever was. “You would have done better”, Candide might have said, “to cultivate your garden.” That, now, is impossible: the war has destroyed it.

Having been refused for active service because of defective eyesight, and after various fruitless attempts, which I have described elsewhere,¹ to get taken as a

¹ *Sans Doute Il Est Trop Tard*, Paris, Hazan, 1937.

volunteer, I applied for a post as interpreter with the British Army. I looked on myself, at this time, as being definitely excluded from the front line category. I did not know that after indignantly refusing the offer of my services, the journeymen of the Third Republic would consider themselves free to call me up again "whenever the fancy took them".

A friend in England, who had approached, on my behalf, a certain highly-placed personage, received in reply a letter of which the following is one of the passages:

"... The question about which you wrote is one entirely for the military authorities. At the risk, however, of having this letter of mine held up by the censor, let me tell you that there is no prospect whatever of our sending fresh troops to France, and that for very good reasons. . . ," the very good reasons being that nothing was ready. There was a shortage alike of arms and ammunition.

I went back, therefore, to the country where I opened a convalescent hospital. No sooner had I done so, than, in obedience to some official ukase or other, I was packed off to swell the number of utterly useless persons who, rigged up in all sorts of absurd uniforms, were allowed to live at the public expense. I acted in turn as Orderly Room Clerk, Clerk to a Medical Officer, in which capacity I copied out lists of patients, Superintendent of women and girls employed in a tobacco factory at Le Mans, and, finally, Secretary to a succession of captains and majors, who used me to write their letters, make copies of circulars, and withdraw from the line a large number of agricultural labourers who were sent back to lift hay when it was really time to be cutting wheat, to cut wheat when they should have been getting in the grape harvest, to assist

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with the vintage when they ought to have been looking after the autumn ploughing, and so on, and so on. I also prepared lists in quintuplicate of locksmiths, mares in foal, and priests (many of these documents contained nothing but a repetition of the word "nil", and were a sheer waste of time). From this it must be sufficiently obvious that we were all heroes in those days. The cult of incompetence is the sole activity to which the beneficiaries of the Third Republic can turn their hands when they have finished lining their pockets.

My dear English friends, you have at least a hierarchy based upon a greater or less degree of real capacity, and if you do suffer from sinecures, there are fewer of them with you than with us, and the people who enjoy them have a certain right to do so. When it comes to what you call "Red Tape", ours easily puts yours into the shade. You have been spared the experience of our genuinely democratic régime. In our army, this shows itself in the way that every officer in favour with the Powers that be spends his time bullying and humiliating everyone who happens to be better educated or better born than himself. You can be quite sure that the elementary schoolboy who has managed to get himself elected to Parliament by backstairs influence will not be long in working himself out of the rut. His ambition is to be in a position to commandeer the car of his former employer, and if the latter happens to belong to a good old family, to force him to act as chauffeur. His fate is far more enviable than that of the Admirable Crichton. This detail will explain how it was that a horde of incapables, all of them the products of the ballot box, were able to prevent the country that has produced the best and most intelligent soldiers in the world, from being

ready in 1914. If your minted gold, my friends, was, in the past, to some extent responsible for producing this state of affairs, you have only yourselves to thank.

I tried to comfort myself by singing "*It's a long, long way to Tipperary*", and since all things in this mortal world have an end, the future, so far as I was concerned, suddenly brightened. This break in the clouds came in the form of a circular, the millionth at least that had been issued since mobilization. It asked for a fresh supply of interpreters to serve on the British front.

I took a risk, and put in the necessary application. I passed the examination. The man who passed me was an officer by tradition and profession, a gentleman, who had been sent down from the front as the result of a serious wound. He read English badly, and could scarcely speak it at all, but he did ask me whether I wanted to get the job.

"Of course", I answered: "it's the one thing I do want."

"I'll put in a word for you then. You'll be far better off doing your bit in the British Army than hanging about here at the beck and call of all these armchair soldiers."

As a result of my success in this famous examination, I was sent down to the Base at Le Havre. The streets were full of handsome English policemen, khaki, and good humour. I was delighted to see at last some signs of military activity, even if it was only concerned with the landing and embarkation of troops. I was filled with warlike enthusiasm.

This enthusiasm was suddenly damped by the vision of a certain Army Corps which had just arrived from across the Channel as reinforcement. It literally struck terror into all beholders. I could only think

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that the War Office, remembering its mythology, had wished to make real the story of the Gorgon. That animal, if you recollect your classic authors, killed with a glance. These, the Gorgons of 1916, were in numbers like the sands of the sea. No need for them to glare at you: the mere sight of them would have reduced the average man to a state of impotence. "More frightfulness", said I to myself, quoting *Punch*. The body in question was an army of "Volunteer Nurses". I saw them charge a strong-point, I should say, a restaurant, where I happened to be seated. How on earth had anyone managed to collect such a body of uniformly frightful spinsters and terrifying widows? Some were young and smooth-faced, others red and bearded, and a bad crossing had not improved their appearance. They carried, slung across their backs, their stomachs, their ribs, all sorts of mysterious odds and ends of equipment. They were all buckles and straps, and one was left guessing at the precise nature of their formidable weapons. Locusta and Circe would have looked like sweet little girls by the side of these harpies. I could only think that they were intended for the front line in the hope that the "Huns", rather than fall into the clutches of these frightful bipeds, would turn and run. I never again set eyes on the fearsome corps. On the contrary, when, two years later, I was in the neighbourhood of St Omer, I made the acquaintance of a regiment of "nurses", dressed like naval officers, who were really "sweet girls". But I shall never forget that shock of terror which I experienced at Le Havre.

I got orders to leave. At last! True, I was being sent no further than Boulogne. At that rate it would be some time before I reached Berlin! At Boulogne

I remained for at least a week. I was once more convinced of the stupidity of the French authorities which sent as interpreters destined to be received in an Officers' Mess, men who ought never to have left the servants' hall. Luckily, the English knew how to distinguish. This fact was very soon, and very pleasantly, born in upon me.

After some time had passed I was summoned to an interview by the Head of all the interpreters. As a devoted official of the Third Republic, he naturally owed his advancement to political wire-pulling, and . . . was almost completely ignorant of the English language. So extraordinary was his accent, that I spent a whole day looking for a certain Lartillaux, whom I finally identified, after following many false scents, as the R.T.O. at Boulogne station.

I got into a train, *not* an armoured one (first disappointment!) which took me slowly to Montreuil. Don't forget, please, that I was quite convinced of the dangers of the "front", and fully expected to find it a place of whistling bullets and exploding shells. True, there was a great hurly-burly of troops and supplies of every description, but, since I was still some distance short of my "battle position", I was not altogether surprised by the absence of any actual fighting.

My impatience to be up and doing must have seemed a little ridiculous to my charming colleagues, the interpreters at the H.Q. of the Nth Corps, and, so to speak, of the fortified zone of Montreuil.

My orders, as a matter of fact, though as yet I didn't know it, were extremely vague. For the time being I was supposed to report to "Cavalry Corps", but there was no hurry. So much for urgency! But all that would be changed as soon as I was really a member of the British Expeditionary Force, and could have

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my letters addressed with those magic initials B.E.F.

Meanwhile, these charming and obliging friends invited me to lunch. They got their rations from the A.S.C. Already I was familiarizing myself with that system of initials which, of all modern inventions, is the most widespread and the most hateful. I asked, naturally, what was meant by the vocable which I had mis-heard as "Aessese". "Riz-pain-sel", I was told. Here, then, were the elements of a new "volapuk": riz=army, pain=service, sel=corps.

It was on this occasion that I was introduced to the famous "bully beef", and to an extraordinary greasy mixture, tasting of tin, which was known as "custard".

When the meal was over, a list of available accommodation was consulted, and I was given a room. Since I fully believed that I was at the front during a quiet period, it seemed to me that to sleep in a room was either imprudent or unseemly. There being, however, no trenches to take, I took the room instead. I returned to the Mess for dinner, after which I slept very soundly, and dreamed that my ears were being deafened by the ceaseless threatening boom of heavy guns, the crash of exploding shells, and the scream of machine-gun bullets.

After a toilette as complete as the restricted facilities of my quarters permitted, I went to the Mess for breakfast. This was a full-dress meal: porridge, bacon and eggs, toast, butter, jam and tea . . . : not too bad a start, and it looked as though my particular war was to be a "stuffing" cure. As soon as I had finished, I rather timidly reopened the subject of reporting for duty.

"Any time you like", came the answer: "there's no hurry. . . . Where are you going?"

This urgency, this detailed efficiency, proved to me that I was already part of the soul—if not of the body—of the British Army, itself a reflection of that great and universal motto “Wait and See”. I was reminded of an article which I had read in a newspaper some years before, when I was in England, the satirical author of which maintained that his country was really a “Do what you like society”. This state of mind certainly makes for comfort. It is infectious. In certain circles “Wait and See” became a rule of conduct. In the long run—so far as the English were concerned—it succeeded in winning the war.

I say so far as the English were concerned because for the French it was absolutely disastrous. Just as the English might have prevented the war from involving the Continent by making a clean breast of their intentions at the beginning of July 1914, so they could have considerably shortened its duration by taking at once steps which they took only at the end of the second year. But “Wait and See” meant, in fact, “if these little ‘foggies’ can settle the business for themselves, so much the better.” The section of British opinion favourable to compulsory service was confirmed in the sincerity of its views by the knowledge that an equally large section was opposed to it. Many felt comforted by the conviction that their proposals would be, if not permanently, at least for the time being, rejected. The part played by relativity in all questions involving British sincerity has not been sufficiently studied.

During my stay at Montreuil in February 1917, I knew only one thing for certain, that I was to be attached to the Cavalry Corps. In my eyes it remained a highly mysterious body. I regarded as mysterious anything to do with military formations. The combination of “Army” and “British” made it all

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more mysterious still. What was this Cavalry Corps? A unit, a conglomeration of units, something in the nature of a Church—established or otherwise. The spirit of the Church as opposed to its body. With the spirit I was at one: I accepted it without question. As to the body, I was soon to be a part of that, was soon to live with it in a deep and impressive intimacy.

"How do I get to Cavalry Corps?"

"It's at Regnière Ecluse."

"And how do I find Regnière Ecluse?" "Well . . . it's over towards Crécy, about thirty kilometres from here."

"Is there any means of getting there?"

"Since you're decently dressed . . ." (I was not a little proud of my 100 per cent. British uniform, made by Hammond of London, and worthy of a General) . . . "all you've got to do is to hang about the station yard. A lot of officers from the train will be going in that direction. You'll see plenty of Daimlers and Rolls's. As soon as you spot a car about to start, just ask whether it'd mind dropping you and your kit near Cavalry Corps."

I carried out these instructions to the letter, and in no long time was settled into a magnificent and luxurious car. At last I was on the high-road to glory!

CHAPTER SEVEN

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OR that was what I thought in my honest simple-mindedness. Seated beside the driver I took no part in the very unwarlike conversation of the officers returning from leave. At length, reaching a certain cross-roads, the car was stopped. I was shown a "French chatoo" standing at some distance from the road.

"There is Cavalry Corps."

The car set off again at full speed before I had finished thanking its occupants.

I was deeply moved. Thus to receive my baptism of fire unfriended and alone! It is always easier to act the part of hero when there is an audience. The air was full of disquieting noises, a deep rumble like that of a violent storm . . . crashes . . . boum, boum. . . . With some relief I noticed that I could hear no sharp whistling of bullets, no heavy trundling of shells. For all that, there could be no doubt that I was in an extremely dangerous area. There was no one near me. I must have stumbled on that terrible place "No

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Man's Land"! The Communiqués were so full of names that Regnière Ecluse had escaped my notice. Almost immediately over my head was a sausage balloon.

Should I walk across the open to the Château, which was almost certainly a strong point? Shouldn't I, in that case, come under the fire of its defenders? It was all very disturbing. Torn by conflicting doubts, I played my part manfully. Leaving my baggage on the edge of a ditch, I set off to where danger beckoned, in a silence that was made the more profound by its background of muted thunder. Onwards, to death or glory!

I found neither. Instead, I became aware of two officers calmly strolling, with their hands in their pockets. I was to learn later that this manner of moving about was eloquent of an easy carelessness in face of danger (impassive faces and a hitching up of breeches). I admired such coolness in the midst of battle. Their caps were adorned with handsome red bands; they were smoking pipes. The two facts taken together pointed to their being officers of high rank. I did not know then that even lieutenants could wear the first when they were on the Staff, nor that pipes were universal. To make out, not only the rank, but the regiment, or even the "arm", of any given British officer, is about as easy as solving a puzzle in twenty seconds, or working out a cross-word at first sight. Rank can be determined only by dint of counting a number of minute metal objects placed, or rather concealed, on the shoulder-strap. The "arm" or the regiment is shown by the way in which the buttons of the tunic are grouped, whether in two's or three's.¹ Names present an even worse problem. How can one

¹ This, in fact, is true only of the Guards. Translator's note.

be expected to know that "Third Dee Gee" means "Third Dragoon Guards", "The Blues", the "Horse Guards", etc.? Always this English, this childish, love of complications, the sole object of which seems to be the embarrassment of those who have something else, or at least something, with which to occupy their minds. . . .

Again, dismounted officers would never think of not appearing in riding breeches complete with leather strappings, while knickerbockers of a particular cut are the special preserve of special regiments. Some formations are "kilted"; that is to say their members sport the attractive, attenuated skirt which sets off the bare knee to such advantage. Oddly enough, the bigger and more virile the man, the better he looks in it. During the war, unfortunately, a khaki apron hid those varied, those admirable, tartans which distinguished the Seaforths, the Gordons, the . . . but really I can't remember them all.

The British Army is fanatically attached to its sartorial traditions, the maintaining of which is laid down in Regulations. Thus, it is forbidden to wear trunks or drawers beneath the kilt—no doubt with the idea of facilitating the carrying out of offensives not all of which are of a purely military nature. In other formations the officers have to wear breeches of a lighter colour than the tunic. The Sam Browne is never taken off except in the Mess. I have seen it worn with shirt-sleeves.

How he has conquered the world, this dear old Sam Browne. Is he still alive? Is there, somewhere, a classical statue in his honour, showing him as naked as Achilles at Hyde Park Corner, but wearing his famous belt?

Khaki, or near-khaki, was absolutely universal.

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The "tin-hats" looking so like Don Quixote's helmet, were painted khaki; the water-bottles—which never contained anything but whisky—were khaki. Shirts, ties, handkerchiefs—all were khaki. I was told quite seriously that white handkerchiefs would have made it too easy for men to make the sign of surrender. . . .

As some compensation for the complexity of uniforms and badges of rank, the word "Sir" was in general use in addressing all officers. It is not only convenient: it has an air of elegance, and brings something of the drawing-room into the battlefield. One is supposed—or was at that time—to use it always in speaking to commissioned ranks, but in practice it was rarely used except to those of the rank of Colonel and over.

In this, my first, contact with His Majesty's forces, I brought out all the "Yes-sir's", "No-sir's" I could. I managed, in this way, to explain that I was looking for the "French Mission". I have forgotten to mention that I had first been offered a drink of some kind or other, which, however, I had refused in my anxiety to be up and doing.

My hosts very kindly gave me the use of an unpretentious Ford of the kind much employed by the British Army, for the purpose of fetching my baggage and depositing me at my famous "Mission".

I need hardly say that my amazement grew when I found that I was to set off for the "trenches" by such means, and without taking any military precautions. I could only conclude that I was in a part of the battle line where, for the moment, nothing much was happening.

My "fighting post" (temporary, no doubt) turned out, in fact, to be in a quiet village, showing signs

neither of devastation nor of defence, called Machiel. On the wall of a house which looked still quite habitable, I saw a board bearing the legend—"French Mission". So there were French missions in France?—it seemed rather paradoxical to me. The fact was that this part of our country at present recognized a double authority, French and British. There were British military police in each village, while French gendarmes marched in rear of every English Division (or Brigade). Only later did I discover that they were generally referred to as "bloody French gendarmes".

Crime was rare. Evil-doers, when there were any, were military rather than civilian. On the few occasions that any of the latter were found guilty of misdemeanours they were handed over by the gendarmes to the French authorities.

My warlike ardour was soon damped when it was explained to me at the "French Mission" that the "front" was twenty kilometres away, that the village in which I found myself was perfectly quiet, that the first thing to do was to get me a room, after which they would see about attaching me to a unit.

I was told that the sausage balloon, the sight of which had so filled me with alarm, was the toy of the Cavalry Corps Head Quarters Staff (though it was known popularly as the "Widow's Dream"). I gathered that the Flying Officers' Mess was one of the best in the whole cavalry area.

As to my functions, they would only occasionally be of a military nature. My job would be to smooth out the various difficulties arising between the invaders (the British Army) and the inhabitants; to pay billets and generally to look after accommodation.

Naturally enough, I did not realize yet that the difficulties of billeting, especially when troops were

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on "the move", came not from the inhabitants whose privacy we abused and whose houses we destroyed, but from the officers, all of whom complained unceasingly that they were being badly treated, or, at any rate, worse treated than their fellows. This form of jealousy gave rise to scenes of dramatic intensity, as for instance, when a Colonel chose to consider that his room or his mess was inferior to that assigned to a younger—or, horror of horrors—an inferior, officer.

The softening influence of what I have called British epicureanism had completely dominated this French mission. The chief object of the war, I was given to understand, was to do as little work as possible, to be comfortably lodged, to have a pleasant mess and good food. It *ought* to be easy, as I have said before, for a Frenchman, provided he is decently bred, to adopt the habits, the manners, and, consequently, the feelings, of the English.

After a profound and leisured study of the various units which had a vacancy for an interpreter, and a progressive elimination of the undesirables, my friends decided that two only looked like being satisfactory: the 10th Hussars and the 3rd Signal Squadron. The Mess, in each case, was particularly pleasant, but that of the 10th Hussars had a reputation for extravagance. I never ceased to be amazed at the importance apparently attached to these "messes", but that was because I had not yet come to understand what they really were.

The Mess in fact is a social framework within the general structure of the army, into which those typically British institutions, independence and liberty, fit with admirable neatness. It is for the officer what the club is for the civilian, a place where rank is forgotten and

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each member can feel equally at home. Respect is shown, as in a club, only on general grounds, to age and position. It is a matter of courtesy and not of discipline. This relaxing of the strict bonds of hierarchy between persons who are all, at least presumably, of the same world, makes for great pleasantness. It is all the more necessary since military and social precedence is sometimes at variance, and since the tyranny of army rank is more difficult to escape than is that of the civilian life.

The French, who lack the ability to make intercourse thus easy and agreeable, have nothing comparable, because, the officers of their army being drawn from very different social classes, there is always the danger that the senior ranks, sensitive to the fact that they are not gentlemen, may suspect a junior, better born than themselves, of wishing to put them in their place without appearing to do so. Such a fear is inseparable from the products of the democratic system, and one of the consequences is that no officer ever forgets, or lays aside, his rank.

The British assumption is that the Mess is a meeting ground for men of the same class; that each of its members will naturally shave before coming to breakfast, will take a bath and change his clothes for dinner, and that the "War" will never, or very rarely, be mentioned in conversation. When the subject cannot be avoided, the speaker always excuses himself for "talking shop". There is something particularly charming in a Colonel, for instance, apologizing to a young interpreter whose only claim to consideration is that he is a "gentleman", for talking shop.

There is a saying "like master, like man". There should be a corollary—"like officer, like soldier", for I am told that similar rules obtain in the Sergeants'

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Mess. . . . I shall have something to say later of the good breeding to be observed among the "common people" of Britain.

I chose the "Signals" for the simple reason that a friend of mine, Poireux (who was attached to the French Mission), told me that I should like its commanding officer, Lord Northbury . . . I could not know at the time that he would be replaced less than twelve months later. When he was recalled to his regiment—"The Blues", i.e. The Royal Horse Guards, that unit already had an extremely popular interpreter, so that there could be no question of my accompanying him.

I had no way of knowing precisely what the function of "Signals" might be, since I had opted for them solely on grounds of social pleasantness. I had, of course, seen sailors signalling to one another with little flags . . . but that side of the problem did not bother me unduly. . . .

No one pressed me to make my decision, and when I finally did so, the business was put through in the course of a telephone conversation one half of which I was privileged to hear.

"Hullo, Signals."

.....
"Is that you, Northbury?"

.....
"Very well, thanks, and you?"

.....
"Decent quarters?"

.....
"Look here, I've got an interpreter for you."

.....
"Yes, I know, but . . ."

.....

"He's quite a different sort of fellow."

.....
 "I think you'll like him."

.....
 "Yes, A. I. . . . Vernon . . . Comte de Vernon.

.....
 "I'm sure he'll suit you down to the ground."

.....
 "Good. I'll send him over at once. Just give me time to inform Liaison."

So that was that. Henceforward I was to be part of His Majesty's Army.

"You see", Captain Durand explained to me, "the last chap they got was the most frightful cad. They asked for his recall . . . said they'd rather do *without* an interpreter. But they'll like you all right."

"And when do I go?"

"Oh, no hurry. Any time you like. You'll find them quite charming."

I liked the social tinge that was thus being imparted to my life as a soldier, and also the apparent elasticity of my orders. The urbanity, the politeness, of the English, is not only attractive but infectious as well. I compared my instructions favourably with the dry and peremptory orders which are the rule in the French "democratic" army.

My "battle position" was, admittedly, becoming more and more a place of peace. Instead of getting nearer to the winding line which constituted the front, I was getting further and further away from it. I found myself, in fact, taking a very leisurely train for Étaples, or, as the English called it, "Itépels".

There, as in every other station, I discovered an R.T.O. who directed me to the quarters occupied by the "3rd Signals" and to the dwelling of the liaison

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officer whose duty it would be to introduce me formally to what was, to all intents and purposes, a club.

And now, alas for my warlike ambitions! I was shown a modest tram and told that it would deliver me at my destination. This proved to be a place called Trépiéd, a tiny cluster of houses separated from Paris-Plage by sand dunes and pine woods.

It was all charm and quietness. I found the house of the liaison officer, who proposed to take me over to the Mess at once, and to find me a room later on.

A room, a Mess, and this was war time! It all seemed very far from bullets and gunpowder. Fortunately, while still at Machiel, I had learned something about the peaceful nature of my duties.

But might not this settling down into a life of comfort be brutally interrupted by an aggressive recall to the realities of camp life, by the need to stand stiffly to attention while I was asked my age, my height, my weight, the date of my last vaccination, whether I could swim, read, write, and do accounts?

I soon found myself in the garden of a rather attractive villa which must have been quite smart in the days before the war. We mounted a few steps, entered a little vestibule, and passed from there into a room where a tall, fair, pink-faced youth was dozing over a book, ensconced in an armchair, his feet on the mantelpiece, warming at a good wood fire that part of his anatomy upon which he ought to have been sitting.

At the sound of our entrance he moved his head slightly, and then, seeing us, jumped up with a broad grin.

"Hullo!"

"Hullo!"

"How d'you do?"

"How d'you do? This is your new interpreter, Monsieur de Vernon.

"How d'you do?"

"How d'you do?"

"Will you have a drink?"

All my fears vanished. The examination I had so much feared all came down to this simple question. My welcome was typical of the charming—and mercifully not dry—English. The smile of this particular representative of his race quickly disarmed me.

"Is Lord Northbury anywhere about?" asked my introducer.

"No, but he'll be back to dinner soon. We dine at eight."

A room was soon found for me in one of the many villas which compose the offshoot of Paris-Plage known as Trépied. Thither I now repaired for a bath and a change before dinner. What, I asked the liaison officer, would my duties be? He replied that when I was wanted for paying billets I should be sent for. Till then, there was nothing whatever for me to do.

On my return to the Mess I found gathered together the men to whom, in the privacy of my own mind, I referred as my "brothers in arms". Civilians have a way of always thinking in terms of the battlefield!

Northbury had an athletic figure and delicate, rather Roman, features. Lippi was fair, full-blooded, and genial. Honeyday might have stepped straight out of the sixteenth century.

I soon found that I had many tastes in common with Northbury and Lippi: a love of horses, dogs and hunting, of everything, in short, that makes life worth living.

Besides those I have mentioned, there was a young

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Australian lieutenant, and I was not a little surprised to hear him referred to as "Intelligence". Was it irony or admiration that dictated the use of the word? Neither the one nor the other, as it turned out: the explanation being that he was the "Intelligence Officer", that is to say, that his duties were to collect and sort information. He was an attractive youth whose only outstanding characteristic was the fact that he happened to be Australian. Generally speaking, I found that all the officers attached to this particular branch of the military art were—how shall I put it?—not pure-blooded. I have come across a good many of them. One was more than part German, another at least three-quarters Chinese.

But to return to the operations which opened for me this memorable spring of 1917. The troops engaged comprised, on the one hand, the officers of my own ship (if I may so phrase it), and on the other, a certain number of visitors. Of these latter the "light cavalry" were represented by a young, golden-haired officer with a stammer (stammering is very common in the English Army, especially in Staff circles), the "heavy" by a big, fat, jovial, red-faced, noisy, "*padre*", who looked as though he had walked straight out of a Cecil Aldin picture. His speciality was not so much prayer as knowledge of horses, though he used the latter as a stepping-stone to religion. To reach the soul of the average Englishman it is necessary, first and foremost, to be a good sportsman, and that he most certainly was. Naturally enough, I had not at first noticed the crosses on the collar of his tunic nor the black silk frontal which should have given me a clue to his identity. From his conversation I imagined that he was some specialist of

the race-course, or a horse dealer serving temporarily in the army.

When I asked Northbury what his rank was, the latter replied:

"Captain—but really, you know, he's an Anglican clergyman. If you want a second mount, or if you'd like to swap your present horse, he's the man to go to. There's no one better for picking up good bargains or arranging exchanges. He always knows what horses are available in the Cavalry Corps and even at Remount depots. He's a jolly good fellow.

I have given an account of the troops, but not yet of the field of battle. This was the dining-room of the villa, and the action was brisk. There was no lack of good and varied food; wine and whisky flowed. I can't refrain from mentioning a particular "Beaune" which would have rejoiced the patriotic (?) heart of Monsieur de Voltaire.

In the course of the meal I did my best to add to my military vocabulary. (I did not know then that no one ever talked shop at table!) One word, which I imagined to be of a technical nature, recurred so often, that finally I asked Northbury next to whom I was placed, what was the precise significance of "shit". With a hearty laugh he replied in a whisper, speaking French with a slight accent:

"Same as 'merde' . . .!"

So Cambronne had spread the light among his enemies, and perhaps Lord Cardigan had shouted the word at the Russians during the charge of Balaclava!

We spent the evening playing Bridge, and in listening to a pianist who arrived with a grin . . . through the window. If I remember rightly, he bore the appropriate name of Smily.

And so ended my first evening "in camp". North-

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bury had fixed me up with an orderly who seemed perfectly capable of carrying out the duties of a valet, just as others had served very efficiently as waiters during dinner.

This orderly arrived next morning at a respectable hour carrying the ritual cup of tea which served as a preparation for breakfast which I was to take later in the Mess. There, in the same room in which we had dined the night before, another orderly helped me generously to porridge, bacon, toast, butter, jam, tea and milk. I lived as well as though I had been in a "hunting box". Hunting being out of the question, a ride was later suggested.

I had been alone at the ceremony of breakfast, and when it was over, I went into the drawing-room where I found the padre-horse-dealer lounging in an armchair reading the morning papers as is the way of all good English Christians.

"Good morning", said I, holding out my hand. An inarticulate groan was the only answer.

He must be deaf, I thought: that's why he spoke so loud yesterday evening.

"Good morning, Padre", I repeated very distinctly, my hand still outstretched.

The Padre turned his head in a dazed sort of way, as though he were emerging from a dream, saw me, got up, took—at last—my proffered hand, and in rather an apologetic tone, remarked, in his turn, "Good morning . . ."

Then he sat down again without another word. I had, already, in the French army, learned a number of lessons in behaviour. I seemed fated to find the school of war a school of manners! If I had been sent to the Russian Army (before Brest-Litovsk), I should no doubt have discovered that the proper thing was

to kiss the Colonel on the lips and call him "little father", as though he were the Czar! What would have been my lot had I been serving as interpreter in Japan or China? In the one case I suppose I should have had to commit Harakiri (I'm told one gets used to it), in the other, put on a false pigtail in order to be able to Kow Tow!

It has taken us more than forty years to learn that the handshake, which we always thought was typically English, to which we are always careful to add the adjective British, is really an invention of the French. It is not customary among Englishmen except on formal occasions, or when two persons are introduced for the first time, and then, if wearing gloves, one must remove the right-hand one, a thing which, in our own country, we do only when we are presented to reigning Sovereigns or Royal Highnesses. Englishmen greet one another with a movement of the head from right to left, and a murmured "morning". I have seen officers who were reading their papers in the Mess say a brief "morning general", without getting up, when a senior officer came in. In the Mess one is at home. The French proverb, on such occasions, might well be modified into "*Chacun chez soi et Dieu pour tous.*"

God, however, in these days, plays a very small part. Never having visited a Catholic Church during my visits to England, and having watched the crowds in their Sunday best going to Morning Service, I had always imagined that public religion and private prayer counted for a great deal in the national life. I realize now, on the contrary, that spirituality does not exist at all in England, though of course there are exceptions to this rule. My illusion about private prayer may have been true in the days of *Tom Brown's School Days*. As to the mob of persons who go to Morning

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Service on Sundays, their object is simply to be seen at "Church Parade", which is a show like any other.

From what I saw when I was in the British Army, I am inclined to think that religion counts for even less in England than it does in France. It is no more than an institution which has fallen into disuse. The habit, the tradition, persists, but nobody bothers about it. Since, however, the country is still, for the most part, governed by gentlemen, it has been saved from the vulgarities of anti-clericalism.

Religion, which, up to the time of the fall of the Stuarts, was a question of the first importance to Englishmen, has since fallen into the background. The Church of England seems now to be little but an antiquated institution. It is only fair to add that the Anglican clergy have not, for the most part, suffered from the mania of interfering in every walk of life, or claimed the right of directing the public conscience, as the Roman Catholic priesthood has done.

Though there is no aggressive anti-clericalism, the clergy are more frequently treated as butts in England than they are in France. There was hardly one "regimental show" that did not contain jokes at their expense, but the mockery is kindly. It is generally admitted that the "*padres*" (I am speaking now of the army) are decent fellows, often badly educated and sometimes sadly lacking in intelligence, who lead regular lives and try to do good. They put in an appearance on the field of battle consoling the dying and visiting the wounded. But that does not give them much influence.

I know one great English landowner—and I have no doubt there are many more in like case—who, though he had a considerable number of Church livings in his gift, was himself, if not an atheist, at least

completely agnostic. Nevertheless, he remained true to tradition. Tradition is the mark of a continuing social order. He stands to me for an example of the highest wisdom, of the same sort of wisdom which animated the old Romans, who never repealed a law but endlessly modified it instead. It is in this respect for the past, this continuity in established customs, however out of date they may be, that England keeps alive that confidence in the future which is her greatest strength.

The English on the whole, however, seem to think it rather absurd that a man should have a living faith in religion. A friend of mine in England once explained to me that though he was the son of a clergyman and had great respect for religion as a social institution, he was quite convinced that it was nothing but a tissue of lies. Another, belonging to one of the oldest families in the country, happening to visit a Church one day in the company of a Frenchman, and seeing his companion take some holy water and make the sign of the Cross, asked, with a laugh, why on earth he did that. He made no bones about showing that he regarded the practice as quite ridiculous.

Before leaving the subject of what William James would have called "the varieties of our religious experience", during the war, let me narrate an incident which is not only typical, but shows how strongly based is the social habit of religious observance . . . so far, at least, as the Established Church is concerned. We were billeted, I remember, not far from Picquigny on the Somme. It was a Saturday, and word came that the Rev. Gibbon would hold a service the next day. His popularity had not diminished, as was shown by the fact that General Harman, commanding the Division, notified the units of his wish that as many

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men as possible should turn out so as not to disappoint the Rev. Gibbon. The response was general, and the Division turned up in strength at Church Parade. Gibbon preached to a large congregation, and the hymns—I speak as one who was present—were rendered with a volume of sound unheard of in the annals of the “Church Military”, I do not say “Militant”.

But to return to Trépied and our sojourn there, to which I look back as to one of the really “good times” of my life. Northbury had a strong sense of humour and liked a laugh at the expense of his countrymen. Thus, one day when we were out riding, he explained to me that the essential thing in English horsemanship was to hold one’s hunting crop in the right way. Success or failure in managing one’s horse was quite a secondary consideration. He showed me the method in vogue at the moment. It was awkward, and made it difficult to use the crop at all. . . .

“Can’t be helped. That’s what’s done, and nothing else matters!”

Bridge played a great part in life as lived at Paris-Plage and its neighbourhood. Since, however, frequent guests came to dinner, and occasionally to stay, some occupation had to be found for them. The gramophone was a great distraction. From it I learned the various English songs of the moment, and one in particular which bore me company through the first “military” job that came my way. For that reason, probably, I have never forgotten it. It was, I believe, out of a Musical Comedy called “*The Bing Boys*”:

*If you were the only girl in the world
And I was the only boy,
Nothing else would matter in the world to-day*

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*We should go on loving in the same old way. . . .
A garden of Eden just made for two
With nothing to mar our joy!
I should say such wonderful things to you,
There would be such wonderful things to do. . . .
If you were the only girl in the world
And I were the only boy!*

My companions, who had a large circle of acquaintances, were much occupied with tennis, golf, and . . . dancing. The Military Hospital run by the Duchess of M . . . was plentifully supplied with charming nurses.

In short, there was not much of the "grandeur" and still less of the "servitude" of the military life. It was, for me, an unexpected aspect of what, in those days, we have often referred to as the "Great War".

But I had to add to my rôle of interpreter that of judge in an international episode, an episode that bore on the "*entente cordiale*", and which, for reasons of their own, the authorities chose to regard as a matter of morals. Treated in this way it was serious enough, since, at least in theory, the British Army does not regard such things lightly. I say "in theory", for whenever I was involved in such episodes, I always noticed that the senior officers—and to their praise be it—concerned themselves first and foremost with getting their subordinates out of the scrape into which they had got themselves.

Every officer and every private soldier in the British Army is assumed to be a paragon of virtue, and all infractions (provided they are known) of the virtue of chastity are punishable by Court Martial.

The proprietor of a small café lodged a complaint to the effect that a certain Sergeant X . . . had "abused" her daughter. "Used" would have been a more

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adequate word, so accustomed was the girl to this kind of experience. Northbury gave me the details of the case, and I set off to conduct an enquiry on the spot—which was an inn. I had no difficulty in reconstructing the crime or in determining the nature of the offence. The Court was held in the yard of a small farm where soldiers were billeted. The “victim” appeared in person, as did her Sergeant seducer. The trial was conducted with all proper ceremony. There were witnesses (?) both civil and military. But agreement had already been reached, and my duties were limited to lending a benevolent ear to a narration of the facts which I had already gleaned. The girl had no doubt been honourably rewarded for her devotion to the “welfare” of her Ally. . . .

It was proved quite conclusively, that if the soldier had been in the girl’s room, it was only because both he and she shared a strong liking for . . . the chocolates which one gave, the other accepted, and both joined in eating. In this, after all, they were doing no more than Adam and Eve had done in the matter of the Apples of Eden.

Both prosecution and defence was conducted in a mood of high seriousness. The “Court” retired to consider its verdict, and, on its return, acquitted the accused. After which I read the girl a little lecture on not giving quite such free rein to her appetite. Everyone left, and peace descended once more on the “scene of the crime”.

During this period of deceptive quiet I indulged to the full in the delights of this northern Capua. I slept and ate just as I wished. Food at “Signals” was so plentiful that in three months I put on well over a stone. . . .

But an Offensive was in the wind, an operation on a

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really large scale, since its object was no less than to break through the German lines beyond Arras. A breach once made, the five divisions of Cavalry were to pour through, occupy the strategic points behind the German positions, and then, spreading out to right and left, take the enemy in the rear and overpower his resistance.

Very soon no one was talking of anything but the "gap". It was mentioned as a sort of jolly outing. "We're 'gap-ing' on the 9th. . . ." We were instructed in the use of gas-masks, and were even trained in passing verbal messages when wearing them. The process was as follows: we had to breathe inside our masks while, at the same time, trying to catch the message, then remove the contraption just long enough to repeat the words in a distinct tone, and, finally, replace the mask. The results were no less comic than disconcerting. They might have proved disastrous had it been "the real thing".

Northbury showed the solicitude of a brother in seeing that I was duly equipped with a camel-hair sleeping bag and a "valise", which consisted of a sack of waterproof canvas which could be used as a bed. When on the move this sack became a travelling bag equipped with vast pockets which could be stuffed with all sorts of food and clothing.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE GREATEST STRENGTH OF AN ARMY LIES IN ITS DISCIPLINE

THIS phrase forms part of the instruction of every French recruit. The outward and visible sign of discipline is obedience to orders. In the course of this narrative I hope to show what important and various consequences may flow from the meticulous execution of no matter what order.

Three stages separated us from the jumping-off position for our famous attack. I began to wonder whether we weren't really bound for some expedition of pleasure, so airily was the whole subject treated in conversation. Ever since the incident of the Trépied "tram" I had been cured of any desire for heroism that I might have had. I even wondered whether, as at the Dardanelles (where, however, the results had not been too good), the enemy had not perhaps been heavily bribed to fire nothing but blanks.

The imminence of the offensive had not led to any stoppage of leave—as it most certainly would have done in the French army. Even if it had not, the idea, with

us, that a man might go off on leave with an attack impending, would have put his reputation for courage seriously in question. Among my companions, however, there was no feeling whatever of this sort, and that one little detail shows how differently the war was regarded by the French and by the English. . . .

For the latter war was still a sport. The "gap" was part of it. Those who, indifferent to glory, were preparing to make their way to Boulogne and the leave-ship, were told:

"But you'll miss the gap!"

At last all preparations for the move had been made. A pile of officers' baggage stood in the entrance hall of the villa. There was a case of whisky; another of port; a Cheshire cheese, sent to Lippi from home, had duly been left to soak for some days in port; the weekly consignment of Guernsey butter sent from Ashburton Park to Lord Northbury, had arrived safely. There was even, in case of food shortage, a much-prized case of special hams ("peach-fed pork, old man") from Lippi's home in Hampshire. . . .

I am forgetting our battle equipment! The Polo sticks were there, the tennis and Badminton rackets. The oars must have been mislaid somewhere, but the gramophone was well in evidence with a large supply of records. There were quantities and quantities of detective novels. . . . But even so we were far from taking everything. An Order of the Day (a Routine Order,—what a facetious Frenchman had dubbed a "Red Tape" order, for the habits of the British Staff are nothing if not rich in red tape) had been issued to the effect that every officer's baggage must be limited to twenty-five pounds. After leaving behind with the caretaker of the villa at Trépied most of my impedimenta, and limiting the contents of the "valise" already

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mentioned to the underclothing, the boots, and the reading matter essential for a few days' pleasure trip, I was sadly afraid that I had overstepped the permitted total.

My baggage, marked with my name in large letters, was ranged with the various stores I have described. Northbury, having a last look round to see that everything was ready, said to me with an air of surprise and a gesture—of the chin only, needless to say—

"Is that ALL your luggage?"

"Yes," I replied; "is that too much?"

"Oh no!" he said with a laugh: "it's so little that I'm nearly ashamed for you. . . ."

I never, after that, took any army orders about baggage seriously. . . . Each of my companions had at least one hundred pounds' weight of it . . . without counting what belonged to the Mess. The novels alone must have accounted for nearly fifty.

The various valises, together with the kitchen stores—crockery, glass, silver, deck-chairs, etc., were all loaded on to a "half-limber". The next thing was to try to harness up two horses. It appeared that no such eventuality had ever been envisaged. . . .

Two half-wild animals were brought for the purpose. They snorted, laid back their ears, started to bite and kick. Obviously they had never been between shafts in their lives. It was clear that no one had ever tried to use them for draft purposes before. One of them began plunging, the other rearing. It was explained to me that they were "remounts".

A "brisk and happy set-to" started about the limber pole; the struggle grew hotter and hotter. After it had been going on for ten minutes, I could not help saying to Lippi that they might have given these remounts a bit of training during the three weeks they

had been there. He burst out with a great guffaw of laughter.

"Oh Veurnoun, you take it so damned serious! Too funny for words!"

The engagement had already produced several casualties; one private had been taken off with a damaged leg. After a counter-attack had been delivered, however, the two "remounts" agreed to accept an armistice. They were led off after having been qualified as "bastards"—and several other things, and another pair was brought—that had actually been broken in to harness.

Shortly afterwards, we started off on the "path of glory". . . . The first few days, favoured by fine, mild, weather, passed like an "honourable pic-nic" (as the Japanese say), with food in the open and nights spent very simply in any rooms I could find in the villages we passed through. My efforts in this direction were superintended by the "camp comedian"—that being the usual appellation of the "camp commandant". Our search was not always successful since each of the Messes insisted on putting in a claim for an attractive villa with all modern conveniences. . . .

Finally the "Great Day" arrived. True to the example of the great Condé on the morning of a battle, Northbury was sleeping so soundly (there were three of us in a tiny room), that his orderly failed to wake him at dawn—which broke about 5 a.m. A little later, I left him and my other companions belonging to "Signals", having been detailed to join a detachment, of the duties of which I was ignorant, under the orders of the "camp comedian".

The "comedian" held the rank of Captain. It was usual to refer to administrative officers by the initials of their function—and what a lot of them there were

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on a Staff! One had to learn how to pronounce this new "esperanto". Why, for instance, was the "Deputy Assistant Director Ordnance Supplies" called Dados and not *D.A.D.O.S.* while the Assistant Provost Marshal had to be referred to as "A.P.M."? Sometimes appellations were shortened, as "Vet" for "Veterinary Surgeon" and occasionally "Doc" for "Doctor". Everyone, from General Vaughan to Lippi, always called my friend and commanding officer, "Bim". I never mastered the etymology of this. . . . Having travelled in Egypt, I wondered whether it was, perhaps, derived from Bim-Bashi, i.e. Colonel.

It's a long, long way . . . from Gouy en Artois to Monchy le Preux—the "glory and the grave" of Bulkeley Johnson. The Third Cavalry Division was, however, under orders from H.Q. to cover this distance during the memorable 9th of April, 1917. Alas! few got there, and none came back. But I must not anticipate.

The winter this year had been terribly severe, and had lasted on into the spring. The sun shone down on a vast and melancholy plain all pink and white with frost. The infernal row which had been coming nearer and nearer each day since we had left Trépied, reached the height of its intensity just before sunrise. We skirted the suburbs of Arras, and from a piece of high ground, with the sun showing brilliant above a sea of low-lying mist, I saw a magnificent sight which recalled the battle pictures of Van der Meulen. There were the same straight roads lined with great trees whose tops just breaking into bud were coloured pink and violet by the sun; the same gently rolling plain, the same closely packed bodies of troops, moving as on parade in impeccable formation, following the twisting and turning undulations of the ground.

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Everyone, that morning, was wearing the steel helmet which, as a rule, was either left with the baggage or carried slung across the shoulder. This flattened object gave the tall, thin, men a strange look of Don Quixote, though their horses had little of the skinny Rosinante about them. It was generally known by the half joking name of "Tin Hat".

I could not help wondering whether the "show" was really to end with a cavalry charge. I had been told that this manœuvre was now completely out of date. Why, then, these close-packed squadrons? . . . I had learned during my brief experience of the French army, that the last thing a soldier must do is to "try and understand".

About 10 or 11 o'clock (I was so much absorbed by the spectacle unrolled before my eyes, that, for all I knew, we might have been already two days on the march), a halt was called and we ate a snack on the reverse side of a slope. In spite of the din, it was all rather like a delightful picnic. Was this really the opening phase of my first battle? Can one be said to take part in a battle when one has neither gun nor sword with which to fire or thrust at the fellows opposite? We were surrounded, it is true, by innumerable "limbers", "lorries", and horse-drawn waggons filled with ammunition. Just beside us, but higher up the slope, was a long line of those heavy guns which I had been told were called "Nine point two's", kicking up Hell's own row.

As far as I could see the ground was covered with other batteries all firing unceasingly. My civilian ears were quite unaccustomed to the noise. It was extremely disagreeable and monotonous. The only distraction for me, who was not used to such things, was to watch the way in which the great guns recoiled

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on their carriages, as though they were themselves amazed at the uproar they had created.

To this solemn accompaniment I hummed to myself the romantic ditty of which I have already spoken. In my mind it will always be associated with the "Arras Show":

*If you were the only girl in the world
and I were the only boy. . . .*

Somehow it never occurred to me that danger was an element of "the play". Everything seemed in such a muddle. The very wounded looked like "stage supers". The only remark that I made in all this hurly-burly was that the drivers seemed to be having some difficulty in starting up their lorries. I could hear them ceaselessly swinging their crank-handles without any apparent result.

"Can't they get their engines to start?" I asked with a jerk of the head towards the rear. (I knew by this time that that was the only gesture permitted to members of the British Army.)

"What d'you mean?"

"They've been at it for the last quarter of an hour at least. Listen, there they are again—Baou, ouaou, ouaou. . . ."

"That's not lorries, old man. That's the big ones coming over! A little present from the Boches! Look down there—no, further—can't you see the bursts?" (with the same old movement of the head). . . .

It was indeed the "big ones" which marked their arrival on the target by giving an imitation of motor engines refusing to start. As to the bursts, since, unless one happened to be close to them, the noise was not synchronous with the flash and the smoke, I never succeeded, in that welter of noise, in distinguishing our

own shells from the enemy's. It was safer, on the whole, to assume that the sound nearest to hand came from *our* guns. The same rule held good for the whistling, whining, and other species of noise with which the air was full.

On this particular morning, the bursts occurred with perfect regularity, one after the other, though there was nobody there to be damaged by them. This apparently, was due to the accuracy of the German fire. Once their gunners had registered a target, they pumped shells into it with such regularity that all one had to do was to make a careful *détour* in order to avoid the spot marked out for destruction. (Please note the progress I had made in my tactical knowledge.)

The realization, however, of where the shells were falling, had reawakened in me all my soldierly instincts. Then this *was* to be the real thing, after all. The thought of the final charge filled me with excitement. But I had not been armed for such an occasion. I had nothing with me but a crop—a fine sporting gesture, but slightly inadequate.

And I was the only boy . . . unarmed.

I consoled myself with the thought that what was written was written.

We were soon on the move again, this time at a sustained trot, with the kind of stoppages that always occur in a long column. In this way we covered several kilometres in a zig-zag line, across a landscape that more and more resembled the end of the world the further we advanced. Upheaval, craters, ruins, such as one might see in a nightmare, earthquake shocks, fire, flame, smoke, the very air seemingly torn to shreds, men and horses hurrying forward. Sharp changes of direction made our progress seem like a dangerous game of hide and seek played with the

bursting shells. I must admit that we seldom made a mistake.

But was *this* a battle? Later, no doubt, I should be told it was. Dust and smoke prevented one from seeing where one was going. The sun was becoming more and more hidden by great yellowish clouds that threatened snow.

What upset my every preconceived notion of war was that, in all the battle pictures of which I was reminded, there was an enemy. Here, not a single one was to be seen. It was all very thrilling, however, since some time or other *they* would doubtless put in a quite unexpected appearance. I don't think I have mentioned the fact that I had been given a mount with the charming name of "Baby". She had a pretty turn of speed. Hadn't she beaten Honeyday's big black horse, "Peter", in the Divisional Races? When the moment came to charge she would inevitably cover herself with glory.

A halt . . . some more trotting . . . another halt. . . . Why, I did not know. On such occasions one halts because the men in front have halted. There's no more to be said. But . . . the enemy? . . . Doubtless they were in retreat, which explained why none of them were visible. . . . Off again. . . . The pace quickened . . . we were moving at a gallop now!

A gallop! This must be the charge! Now for it. . . . Memories of famous charges in history: Eylau, Waterloo, Balaclava, Reichsoffen. . . . In a moment or two we should see the mouths of cannon vomiting shot and shell . . . the German line bristling with bayonets . . . the Prussian Guard . . . *black guards*. . . . I should strike at them with my crop from "Baby's" back. . . .

What . . . a charge? . . . surely a *race*. . . . Was I

dreaming? . . . Suddenly, in the midst of all this desolation, we had come on a large, level, space, the starting-point, it appeared, of a path so neat that it looked almost as though it had been freshly swept, and marked at intervals with little blue triangular flags—a racecourse, in fact!

A clean, well-kept pathway, marked out with blue flags! It must have been laid out by "Signals" in readiness for the Divisional Sports! . . .

But race-course or no race-course, the pandemonium was becoming more and more intolerable. . . . The body of horsemen of which I formed part, took to the flag-decked path at the gallop. There were too many of us for a race. Were Baby and I in the middle of a charge?—the charge of four thousand this time.

Thoroughly puzzled, I managed to shout to my nearest neighbour:

"What's the meaning of these flags?"

"It's the cavalry track. . . ."

The "track" leading to the "gap". That was it! We were embarked for death or glory, then: we were making our *début* on the stage of history . . . A charge! How terribly thrilling!—and unarmed too! Unlike Richard III at Bosworth I had a horse—but no sword.

I must get hold of one somehow!—must take one from the first enemy who surrendered!—Forward!—against the Huns!

A sharp word of command was passed down from the front. A sudden halt. What had become of the cavalry track? It had been blown into thin air like everything else in this landscape so much more horrible than anything imagined by Dante for his *Inferno*. On this chaos of bursting shells and smoke into which we had plunged the snow was falling steadily, veiling the

horror of it beneath a clinging whiteness that was like a layer of paint.

Dismount! . . . Was the charge over, then? My orderly, Ponton, led off Baby to the shelter of a shell-hole. As to us, we squatted, sat or lay in any depression we could find. . . . The wind whistled, driving the snow in our faces, so that we were soon covered with flakes. . . . Meanwhile, that other whistling grew more and more persistent.

A few officers remained standing, towering over the various groups. There was Northbury, imperturbable as ever, his glasses in his hands. He looked so big that surely he ought to be getting down a bit. The snow sticking to his clothes gave him the appearance of a ghostly Lohengrin in shining panoply and helm of silver. The white, fantastic figures all about reminded me of one of Gustav Doré's illustrations to Coleridge's "*Rime of the Ancient Mariner*".

"See the infantry?"—said somebody (it was impossible to be sure of anyone's identity).

"They're making a good advance."

"Fine!"

As a matter of fact, one could see nothing. Smoke, shell-bursts, falling snow! Suddenly, "Intelligence" was at my elbow.

"Where 'you from? What's the news?"

"*I should say such wonderful things to you. . . . If you were the only girl . . .*", I replied.

"They are progressing towards Monchy-le-Preux."

Monchy-le-Preux had once been a hill. It was now flattened. . . .

Some of us began to follow, with a movement of the head, the noise of the shells going over to our right, where, at a short distance, they were bursting in jets of flame and smoke among the remnants of what had once

been a wood. Branches, thicker than my body, were flung thirty feet into the air, and fell, apparently without noise, so impossible was it to distinguish particular sounds in the general row. It was like watching bits of straw flying from a threshing machine. . . .

"That's Tilloy", said somebody.

It was once, perhaps, but it would have been a clever man who could recognize anything now resembling a village. There were our maps, of course, but . . .

How long did we stay there lashed by fire and snow? It seemed to me a hundred years. Time passed while we waited for orders.

A neighbouring unit with which a French friend of mine was serving, was told to push forward. He went off with the rest. Having served up till then with the French army in the trenches, he had been transferred to the Corps of Interpreters by reason of his age. In a moment or two he reached a crest in company with one of those "boy officers" who looked so charming in their khaki and leather. They had halted just where the competition of machine-gun-bullets, field-gun shells, and other playthings of a like nature, could be seen to its fullest advantage. The English officer stopped in the most exposed spot.

"But we can't stay here!" said my friend, who knew full well the meaning of this kind of music.

"I—I—got no orders!" was the answer. My friend (who, as I have said, had three years of infantry experience behind him) proceeded to lie down.

"You mustn't do that! You mustn't let the men see you lying down. . . ."

The discussion came to a sudden end when my friend got a little "souvenir" in the shoulder. He was evacuated, and thereby saved from taking part in a new and disastrous Balaclava charge.

THE GREATEST STRENGTH OF AN ARMY

At this moment the 10th Hussars received the order to mount. General Bulkeley Johnson had been told to take Monchy-le-Preux. . . . It was a piece of rising ground and was stiff with machine-guns. I was told afterwards that the General, realizing the impossibility of carrying out his orders, dashed ahead of the 10th Hussars so as to prevent the useless massacre of the three regiments of his Brigade. He was killed a moment later, and the first regiment annihilated. In view of this happy event, the other two were told not to proceed with the attack. Very few of those who had started off got back unhurt. Many didn't come back at all.

Nevertheless, next day, a little officer of the same Brigade, stammering and high-spirited (Except ye become as little children . . .), speaking with an exaggerated gaiety in view of the tragic nature of the circumstances, explained to me that this disastrous attack had proved one thing:

"... that a force of cavalry can, after all, get through an artillery barrage without too much difficulty. . . ."

Amidst the gloomy desolation of frozen shell-holes, we were still waiting for orders. Suddenly, someone asked me a question. So far I had received but one order in the whole course of the day—to water my horse. Now, as then, it was the "comedian" who spoke:

"Vernon, you have nothing to do here, why don't you go and make yourself comfortable?"

Dear, sweet, comedian, what a delightful idea! And so easy to put into operation! Comfortable! Such a thing would never have occurred to a Frenchman—certainly not that I should go and make myself comfortable and leave my companions to the cold, the snow, . . . and the danger.

I certainly was far from comfortable. The enthusiasm of the famous charge had evaporated. I was cold and hungry. I could find no pleasure in the stuff that was falling all around. But to leave my friends who were feeling just exactly as I was! The dear man wanted to justify his name and strike the comic note! Comfortable, in this hell! There was something Homeric in the word.

"I am all right", I protested.

My fellow officers seemed to see eye to eye with the camp commandant.

"If I were you", said "Intelligence", "I should go. There's nothing left to do here. The gap is given up."

What!—then it was over. I should not have *my* battle after all. My dream of glory was dissipated almost before it had begun. The camp commandant was insistent. Finally, his words took the form of an order.

"Vernon, do go and make yourself comfortable . . . in Arras! . . ."

Did he want to save me from the massacre to come? Why? There was nothing to do but obey and forget my foolish French scruple of honour.

Make yourself comfortable. . . .

"Nothing else would matter in the world to-day."

How well the song chimed with the circumstances. Common sense agreed with the commandant. To risk illness, or wounds, or even death, just for the petty glory of staying with my friends who were freezing where they stood—"How absurd!"

It was they who urged me to take the road to this problematic comfort. What an example of the different ways of regarding useless bravery. . . . I have just described what a civilian would have regarded as this *mad* attack on Monchy-le-Preux. Yet the men

who had taken part in it had said to their friends going on leave just before the offensive opened:

"You are lucky."

Just because for me safety was a possibility, they were forcing me to seek it. Don't tell me, after that, that the French and the English can ever understand one another! Words have completely different meanings for them—and as to ideas! There is the whole width of the Channel between the ways our minds work.

Be that as it may, I had been trained since childhood in the belief that the greatest strength of an army lies in its discipline, and that the first duty of a soldier is to obey. Obey then I would.

I was given a vague indication of the road to take. I got hold of my horse—dear Baby. How on earth was I to reach that "garden of Eden" which lay in the heart of bombarded Arras? Well, I must try my luck.

The paths I followed were like mountain tracks. We climbed, we descended, we lost our way. It was as though we were travelling in the crater of a not yet extinct volcano. It seemed a long way to me.

"It's a long, long way . . ."

I went over in my head all the details of the day that had seemed so interminable. Had this really been a battle? Had I received my "baptism of fire"? Was what I had seen a cavalry charge . . . though without results? An odd sort of battle, anyhow, in the course of which I had not so much as set eyes on a Boche. . . . War, "Great" indeed, during which I travelled onwards always to the unknown, and always seeking some problematic comfort—no easy thing to do.

Caught in the desolation of that cataclysmic world, I never managed to hit the "cavalry track". It must have been blown to smithereens since we passed along

it. What is the use of a map when the whole universe is reduced to a monotonous identity of chaos? Arras was no more than a few kilometres off—in a straight line, but how keep to *any* line in a scene littered with insurmountable obstacles, and altering its very face and structure from moment to moment?

The stream of wounded gave me some idea of the direction I ought to take. But for this assistance I should have found it the easiest thing in the world to lose myself, for the snow had reduced everything to a uniform whiteness broken only by the black craters where shells had burst.

I had no time to note the tragic aspect of what lay before me. I was intent only on remaining as long as possible under shelter, and not getting lost among the holes and hummocks of this land. . . . A long retreat indeed it was!—only after a great lapse of time did I reach a sort of foot-path where the going seemed more or less level. I was leaving Hell behind me. There were occasional ruins; I began to pass bits of buildings, traces of streets, occasionally a house which was almost intact. Arras at last! The general lay-out of the place had survived: the chief traffic arteries were constantly being repaired: movement within the town was relatively easy.

My map now began to be of some use in giving me my position, though Arras itself occupied a very small part of it. I reached a street which must have been formerly an important thoroughfare, but it was joyless now (as the poet sings) though full of noise, for all that the inhabitants had fled.

The German swine were still bombarding the place. English guns were hidden behind every scrap of standing wall. The air was alive with the whistling of projectiles, the noise of guns firing and shells bursting.

THE GREATEST STRENGTH OF AN ARMY

I decided wisely to treat *all* these various sounds as due to the firing of our own artillery—the bang of guns discharged, the rumbling and wailing that each such discharge produced. Let's have nothing to do with discussing the "origin of species": let us at least find comfort in the illusion that we are in no manner of danger, that it is, on the contrary, the enemy who must suffer from our crushing, crashing, pounding storm of steel. Forward, then, to comfort, free of fear: forward to—

The garden of Eden just made for two . . .

Two?—but who was to be the other? Could I count on finding a heart to take by storm. . . . While waiting for an answer, I gave all my attention to finding another heart—cold as I was—the heart of the town.

My war experience, then and later, has taught me that soldiers on active service are always in a state of being lost, and that anyone who says he knows the way to anywhere *must* be wrong, being lost himself. The only victorious army is the army which, like Kipling's ship, "finds itself".

I continued my search among the ruins. A passing soldier had mentioned that he thought he had seen a hotel—"somewhere over there"—and I was wondering where one might discover "the only girl in Arras," when, lo and behold!—real or dream, a sudden radiant apparition! . . . A door opened—the good people of Arras had clung to the superstition of sometimes having doors, though windows, roofs, and even walls had almost become things of the past. The corner of the town in which I found myself must have been privileged. The house, the door of which had just opened, had still, so far as one could see from the street, all its storeys and most of its roof intact, and,

as though all was peace and quiet, the magic word "Hotel" welcomed me from above the entrance.

Astute tactician that I was, not only had I found myself, but—in strict obedience to the orders I had received—I had discovered a place where I might be comfortable! A hotel! At last I had attained the objective of my offensive of the 9th of April! All courage now, I set myself to mount to the assault. The position was defended by a smiling vision in a pretty, white apron, looking as though she had nothing in the world to worry her.

"Good morning, young lady" (she was not old enough to be a married woman), "d'you happen to have a room free?"

"They are all free, sir" (with a smile).

The place, I could see, would yield without a blow.

"One will be enough—but has it a bed?"

"Mine is the only bed in the house, sir: but you can make up your blankets anywhere you like. Perhaps I can find you a little straw."

"I should prefer a bed."

"Well, we must see," said she still smiling.

My hold on the objective was secure. If my offensive continued with the same success, I should have merely to exploit my initial victory.

I laughed aloud, thinking of that decent fellow the camp commandant". If he could see how conscientiously I was following out his instructions to "make myself comfortable".

*For SHE was the only girl in Arras
And I was the only boy.*

At this point dear Baby—my horse I mean—started shaking her head with a great jingling of accoutrements, to remind me of her presence. I had

left her tied up while I went through the preliminaries necessary before I could carry out my orders. "Poor girl", she too wanted a little intimate happiness. I asked, therefore, where I could find some stables. The lady of the hotel told me that there was a barracks quite close—not more than five minutes' walk.

"Keep me the room—and the bed," I cried; and leaped happily into the saddle.

Baby listened, her two ears turned towards me.

"Baby, old girl", I said, "please remember that I am only carrying out battle orders. I have been told to occupy a comfortable position. I should never have dared to take the offensive, but the enemy has exposed her advance position:" (the other "girl" was wearing a bodice cut gloriously low, despite the cold): "in face of such provocation I duly attacked."

Baby's only reply was to make the sort of whinnying sound that horses sometimes employ to show that they understand. But as soon as she came within range of the delicious smell of the stables she gave a discreet neigh of pleasure. So there were still stables there? But really the Germans are the limit. Just as we were preparing to ride in, one of their heavy shells arrived, puffing and blowing like a great oaf, and plumped itself down in the middle of the street, just opposite the open doorway. There was barely time for me to leap to the ground and throw myself flat. . . . One, two, ten, seconds passed, and each seemed like an hour. . . . Was I dead? was I buried? Complete silence reigned. Could this dust, this cloudy mist, be the atmosphere of Paradise? No! . . . After what appeared to be a century I cautiously raised a greenish face. Baby was still there, a cunning look in her eye, and no more than slightly stunned by the arrival of our fat, noisy, German friend.

There he was, his nose stuck fast in the roadway. . . . Was it all just a bad joke, or did the God of Battles have me in his special protection? The joke was a little excessive, even assuming that such little presents from the Boche did not burst. . . . Suppose the beastly thing had fallen on my head! Good bye then to any hope of comfort! In such conditions it might have been difficult to carry out my orders!

As soon as I was a little calmer, I picked my way cautiously round the obstacle, and approached a jolly-looking "private". I asked him whether he would mind looking after my horse. On his replying "not at all", I asked him to give Baby a good grooming, and to see that she had some water to drink at once, not too cold.

"Of course, sir."

"And some oats. She needs rubbing down, too. She's been standing in the snow since five this morning. . . ."

"Yessir".

"Are the stables all right?"

"Quite comfortable, sir."

Allah is great! She too "will make herself comfortable."

"Much of . . . this sort of stuff?"

"No, sir, just a few."

"As well behaved as the last one?"

"No, sir. I mean not all."

"Well, my batman is Ponton. You'll remember his name: PON TON. 3rd Signal Squadron."

"Yessir."

It was almost dark when I turned up again at my battle-post where I hoped—

"To try my strength in glorious
Fields of Love. . ."

THE GREATEST STRENGTH OF AN ARMY

—as Boileau would have said. Would everything turn out well?

The “only girl” was called Mariette. A woman came in to help her with the cooking. Between them they “ran the hotel” (with what results I proposed to find out).

It was only later that I discovered that the English had women of their own to look to the needs of the army (Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps).

I was given—first—an excellent meal which I shared with a variety of officers, all of them in somewhat of a hurry to get back to their own particular home comforts. Personally, I was determined to stand my ground, to defend to the last gasp the positions I had conquered, and to press my advantage still further.

The room was huge, and admirably ventilated, thanks to the complete absence of window panes. The German specialists in up-to-date hygiene had gone so far as to provide extra air-inlets in the ceiling. Since it seemed possible to cook a meal, there must be means of getting hot water. I found that there was no lack of it. A hotel in ruins is like an abandoned city which one can ransack. I did so. I managed to collect a great variety of utensils and to prepare the equivalent of a good bath.

The bed was vast, and seemed, if I may say so,

“... *just made for two.*”

When the “Arras girl” had got rid of the last of her guests, she came to see whether I had everything I required for the night.

“Not everything”, I told her, for my favourite song was still running in my head:

“*There would be such wonderful things to do . . .*”

OLD ENGLAND

I have the happiest memories of this episode of the "world war". I was reminded of all the war poetry I had ever read.

*"Oh wherefore come ye forth in triumph from the North?"*¹

Yes, armed for what triumphs, fair northern maid?
Did I sleep? I think rather that I dreamed:

*"My love in her attire doth show her wit
It doth so well become her;
For every season she hath dressings fit
For winter, spring and summer.
No beauty she doth miss
When all her robes are on:
But Beauty's self she is
When all her robes are gone."*²

My dreams, if dreams they were, were set to an accompaniment of infernal music.

I woke at last. It must be late. Snow had blown into the room. . . . The uproar continued.

*"The splendour falls on castle walls
And snowy summit old in story:
The long LIGHT wakes across the HALLS
And the wild EXPLOSIVE leaps in FURY."*³

Was it some fairy who had piled on me a mound of eiderdowns as high as the hill of Monchy-le-Preux?

I must really get up. The sun had come out, and was shining on the snow-covered ruins.

When I went downstairs I found several other warriors seated at table. I asked for news. The offensive was "washed out." But I had played my part in the "Arras Show". This particular performance was over. "All's well that ends well." . . . The actors

¹ Macaulay.

² Anonymous.

³ After Tennyson.

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were leaving the stage; we should meet again in the wings. . . . I even succeeded in discovering the whereabouts of the theatre technicians—I mean "Signals". The poor devils had spent the night in a concrete shelter.

"In such a night as this!"

All honour to the ill-starred brave, said I to myself. Very soon I was making ready to move with them once more—this time backwards.

I drew near, my arms extended—to embrace not, as on the films, “The Girl in the Bath”, but a very small soldier—a “P-B man” (P.B.=Permanent Base) who looked very solemn and clicked his heels at sight of me.

“Can I have a bath?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“A *hot* bath?”

“Yessir.”

I passed through a series of corridors open to the sky, but furnished with a handsome floor of duck-boards set precariously on bricks of different sizes, which led between decently solid walls. At last my P.-B. opened a door and stood back.

“Here you are, sir. I’ll prepare it immediately.”

Sweet was my surprise when I found that it was necessary only to turn a tap. Boiling water flowed at once into an immense receptacle mounted solidly on bricks. The bathroom was no less well ventilated than had been my bedroom of the night before. Most of its walls were standing, there were shutters to the windows, and the ceiling, God be thanked, was sufficiently intact to keep out the snow. There was also a chair, though, unlike the little soldier, it had no permanent base, being equipped with a **back but standing** on three legs of unequal length.

Supporting one edge of the **chair against the bath**, and the other on some bricks (there was no shortage of bricks in Arras in 1917) I accomplished the prodigious feat of removing boots and clothing **standing upright** on this perilous perch, preliminary to plunging into the water, the temperature of which must have been in the neighbourhood of 50°.¹ It seemed all the hotter for the snow which was blowing regularly, though in small quantities, into my bathroom through the holes

¹ Centigrade. Translator’s note.

in the shutters. What with the batteries camouflaged everywhere among the ruins, the whining of shells, explosions, and the noise of collapsing masonry, my bath was taken to an accompaniment of very varied music.

This "total immersion" is one of my happiest memories of the war. What did I care about shells and snow!

"Whether they burst or no", I thought, "at least I shall die clean!"

Neither I nor the historians of the war will ever know how long I stayed there. I was quite exhausted, I think, by the combined effects of warmth, fatigue, and . . . "making myself comfortable". When I once more became fully conscious, I felt much as a lobster must do in a boiling pot. Whether I should have been good to eat I do not know, but I do know that it seemed impossible I should ever be cold again!

And now another acrobatic feat was called for. "Sensational turn: Nude man will maintain his balance on two legs of a chair while putting on all his clothes. First public performance, Arras 1917." This turn has since then been plagiarised by the clown Grock, with the exception of the nudity. After my triumph that day I could be counted among the sound actors on whose services the "camp comedian" might always rely.

Brisked up, and as red as the tabs on an English Staff Officer's tunic, I was able to resume with a lighter tread my peregrinations among the "Stones of Arras". Poor dear Ruskin! how surprised he would have looked to see me emerging from my bath in so Pre-Raphaelite a manner!

When I got back to my dear Baby (the mare, I mean), I was greeted by the smiling face of the excellent Ponton. Like a good retriever he had

followed my scent until he found me. He, too—quite fairly and honourably, be it understood—had happened on an obliging young woman—the daughter of the provision-merchant whom I have already mentioned. To obtain the information he required, he had “caught hold of her by the weak part of the whole sex—you shall not mistake me—I mean her curiosity”.¹ He told her a story of his own invention, and painted so heroic a portrait of me that the dear child’s interest was immediately aroused. She had heard her father saying something about “a Frenchman who was looking for a bath”, and the retriever, starting out at once on the scent, had found my little P-B, guided by whom he had followed my tracks as far as the barracks where, beating me by a short head, he had (figuratively speaking) fallen into Baby’s arms and, a moment or two later, into mine.

Radiant with delight, he recounted his experiences of the previous day. I dared not ask him whether we might be said to have been present at a *battle*, or whether it was a *show* in which we had each played such a different part.

I went back to the hotel to say good-bye to the girl who had been so kind to me.

There HAD BEEN such wonderful things to do. . . .

Finding myself with time on my hands, I went on with my previous reading of a History of England. I had got as far as the Wars of the Roses. . . . By the name of what flower would *this* war be known?

We moved back to the peace of the base areas. A few days later we were at Ligescourt, quite close to Crécy, a place which has given its name to a soup and to the battle fought there in 1346.

May I be allowed to narrate here a serio-comic

¹ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*.

incident which occurred during our stay at Ligescourt? One morning a squadron of the "Blues" was parading for horse inspection. High up in the sky there appeared an aeroplane which seemed to be in difficulties. In a few moments it became obvious that it was a German. It must have had engine trouble, for it began to come down in wide circles, and finally landed in a field.

The "Blues" trotted up to take possession of it. The machine was surrounded by two hundred magnificent men and as many horses—but without a weapon among the lot of them. This the aviators soon perceived. They leaped from their Fokker, automatics in one hand, bombs in the other, and proceeded to keep the two hundred "horseguards" at bay while they set fire to their aeroplane, after which, ostentatiously throwing aside their weapons, they advanced with their hands up in token of surrender. Nobody bore them the slightest grudge for this trick played on the men of His Majesty's Army. On the contrary, the general opinion was that they had been "damn smart". Head Quarters gave them a warm welcome and an excellent dinner, after which they sent them down to the "cage".

Lippi, who was a flying officer seconded for service with "Signals" was invited to the meal. On his return he said:

"Really fine chaps they are."

A few days later, we heard—from civilians of course, that we were to be sent somewhere near Péronne.

No doubt with the object of taking a good-tempered revenge for the trick played by the German aviators, two English flying men managed, one cloudy day, to fly low over a German camp and drop an enormous bomb—in the form of a football bladder!

CHAPTER TEN

CAMPING

I WENT on ahead. We were to go into camp to the east of Péronne, between Villers Faucon and Epéhy, in a part of the country which had been evacuated by the Germans when they executed their famous strategic retirement. The whole countryside had been carefully devastated. Of the villages scarcely a trace remained, and all the trees had been cut down. The objects of this destruction, which had been carried out with skill and brutality, were now clothed in all the glorious foliage of a spring which had come with bright sunshine after a period of late frosts. These fertile plains must have been sown, for I found myself riding through a sea of young corn still green, and of oats already showing a glint of gold, while over all was spread the coloured wealth of cornflowers and poppies. The whole air was full of the delicious smell of the lovely May-time.

Was it a dream or a mirage? I had just seen, picked out clearly against the delicious blue of the sky, on the top of a gentle rise, an incredible cloud of pink

and white, a mountain of flowers, a giant's bouquet. Half believing that I was asleep, and quite sure that I was no actor in a war, I turned my horse towards this vision. As I got nearer I saw that this huge posy, this hill of flowers, was, in truth, an enormous white-thorn, as tall and as full as the chestnut trees that used to line the Parisian Boulevards before the war, but with branches down to the ground, and entirely covered with pink and white blossom!

The name on the map was "Epine de Certamont". But very soon both sky and earth burst into blossom of a different sort—at first black, then grey, finally white, but all fading almost as soon as they appeared . . . shells of varying calibres. I was back again in the real world. I was approaching Epéhy.

Camping! Who has not dreamed of camping? Nothing looks prettier than a camp with its white, grey, or ochre-coloured tents. Our own was dotted picturesquely over a reverse slope at the bottom of which flowed a little stream. On the further bank was a rising wood in which there were a good many tall trees still standing and many thickets of underbrush.

On the flank of our hill, and well in view, was a huge "marquee" (an English word meaning a gigantic tent about sixty feet long and twenty-four wide). This was the Head-Quarters Mess. All about it, ranged in due order of precedence and well sheltered from the wind—no one bothered much about shells for it was a quiet sector—stood handsome circular tents for the "red tapes"¹—as officers on the Staff were called from the scarlet band which they wore round their caps. (The

¹ Our author must, I think, mean "Red Tabs" from their gorgets. Translator's note.

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same expression is used in referring to military, and perhaps civilian, memoranda, from the colour of the string with which the files are tied).

Various groups of similar, though more modest, round tents lay about like tiny villages, each clustered round its mess. Our own mess tent was rectangular in shape and provided a not very efficient screen against wind, sun and rain. Still, war's war. . . .

This accommodation was reserved for officers. They must be considered to enjoy some special favour of the God of Battles, for the men had to make do with common or garden "dug-outs", underground shelters which were secure from shrapnel bullets and shells of every description.

Along the bottom of the valley which separated us from the little wood, flowed a stream. Here were the horse and mule lines, while, beyond, were parked the transport waggons, most of them great four-wheeled contraptions. The whole scene was like something out of the Old Testament or a picture of life in the Far West. One was reminded of illustrated editions of the Bible, of engravings representing the wanderings of the Jews, of the pictures in novels by Fenimore Cooper showing long lines of heavy vehicles taking emigrants to the Far West.

The air was full of the neighing of horses and the long-drawn cry of mules which is so like the despairing sound of some animal in agony.

Each morning the men came from their dug-outs to tend the animals of the caravan or horde. For an army, surely, is no less a horde than the tribes that went campaigning in the days of Ghengiz Khan?

The batmen opened up the tents one by one, and then was seen a picture reminiscent of the Garden of Eden—the occupants taking their "tubs" in the spring

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sunshine, either in the entrance to their homes or on the grass outside. The birds sang.

But sometimes a storm came to trouble this peaceful idyll. It was announced by aerial messengers. At first would come a gentle southing like that made by wind in the trees. It grew in violence until it was an ear-piercing shriek. Suddenly a black cloud would appear which drifted away in white filaments . . . the noise became a tumult and reached its apogee in a terrible explosion. . . . Once, twice, ten times, a hundred times. The puffs of white and black smoke showed everywhere, heralding a scurry of something like hail. Finally, the storm would quieten down and the birds start singing once again.

Several times, both night and day, the noise would recommence. At such times the dug-outs occupied by the simple privates seemed highly desirable! But how should they compare to the open air which assured us so healthy a life? "Healthy", perhaps, but the heat by day was stifling, and the damp after nightfall so extreme that books disintegrated and the best polished boots soon showed signs of mildew. . . . As Richard of Bordeaux said in his prison—"It's bad enough to lose a throne, but to have to put up with badly cleaned boots as well. . . .!"¹

Our tents had another disadvantage. On days of storm or high wind one felt as though they would be torn up and whisked away, canvas, pegs, packing-cases, and all, to the edge of the world. Such disasters did sometimes happen. It may sound comic enough, but we did not find it so, and when the storm was of human origin, when "stuff" began falling all around, I am not sure that it was even very "healthy". The English have a phrase which they are fond of using in matters

¹ From *Richard of Bordeaux*, a play given in London in 1933.

of personal combat. "Give him a chance"—they say, meaning the other fellow. Anti-aircraft gunnery was an admirable example of this rule in practice. "Chances" at such times are equal, for one's own men on the ground, and the enemy above it, are impartially sprayed with shrapnel.

Whether it was the Germans firing at our 'planes, or our "Archies" (anti-aircraft guns) in action against *them*, the results were the same so far as we were concerned, and the shower of flying metal made a noise like hundreds of mad cats.

In the early days people used to collect the splinters and keep them as souvenirs, making ink-pots, paper weights, and paper-knives out of them. I believe I have still got one somewhere. But by the end of the war we had seen too many shells to bother about that kind of thing.

Many of my friends and allies made collections of these knick-knacks. They set great store in having them in a virgin state. The excellent Colonel Cumming (who came to a tragic end, being shot by his Irish compatriots shortly after the war) had a regular store of dud German shells of all calibres. He took care, however, to have the detonators removed by the armourer-sergeant, after which he got them polished and ranged in all their glory of shining copper, steel, bronze and aluminium on shelves specially constructed for the purpose. I remember that in one of our billets he reserved a separate room for his collection. It was a regular museum.

Captain Whimbrel's hobby was quite different. The man was well suited by his name, being very tall, with excessively long legs and a rather paunchy body. His head was small and his rather surprised-looking eyes peered out from behind very strong spectacles. . . .

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He was, in his way, a globe-trotter, and had hunted in every country of the world. There was no kind of "game", so it was said, that he had not been after, from elephants to mice. Reduced to the rather vaporous functions of "gas officer", he could indulge to the full his passion for hunting. He had discovered something that was almost as dangerous as any wild animal—unexploded detonators. He was, one might say, Colonel Cumming's complement, for what one threw away the other collected, and vice versa. His playthings were no less charming to look at, but they were exceedingly small, and there was always a risk that they might go off. His mania ranked high among sports involving, as it did, a strong element of risk.

Whimbrel was very clever with his hands and always undetonated the shells himself. He had a special tool for the purpose, and, I must admit, did not know what fear was. Personally, I was terrified whenever he began playing with his "toys" and showing me how they worked.

He loved saying that somewhere in his kit he always carried enough high explosive to blow up a whole village.

Another colleague, a Staff Major with a sense for the practical, was interested only in objects of a reasonable size. He had a particular fondness for the magnificent copper cases of the German 420 mm. shells. They would make, he said, such splendid umbrella stands after the war. I believe he has a separate one for each of his guests in his present house.

In camp, as elsewhere, it was inevitable that military subjects should sometimes come up in conversation. But even as near the trenches as we were, an immutable law ordained that the speaker should always preface his remarks by saying "Excuse me for talking shop".

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This praiseworthy and characteristic tact of the English obtains in civil as well as in army life. It is considered rather ill-bred to talk to a man of anything to do with his profession. It makes ordinary life very calm and peaceful.

Under canvas as well as in billets we observed the excellent custom of changing for dinner. English military life has always something in it of the civilian and even of the civilized. I found this particular kind of civilization which ordains, or permits, that a man should have a bath and put on more comfortable clothes—"slacks" and light shoes in place of breeches and boots—before he sits down to eat, very comforting.

Our time in camp was a regular summer holiday. It was the best period of the year. The country round Epéhy, Villers-Faucon and Roisel, was astonishingly green, provided, of course, that one did not go beyond a certain line eastwards. It was sad to see the trees all cut down, but the roots had not been entirely severed and the sap was still rising, so that the branches were duly covered with leaves, blossom and fruit. The cherry trees, lying flat on the ground, were smothered in scarlet fruit.

The ground was thick with flowers. The birds sang. The days were hot though the nights were chilly. It was so fine that, whether riding or walking one always went in shirt-sleeves, being careful to retain the "Sam Browne belt" as a badge of rank, and always carrying one's gas-mask in a little bag of grey cloth. No tin hat. It was an object of great distaste. Even when it was obligatory we wore it slung on our backs.

Foolish, you will say . . . perhaps. But in that, as in other matters, there was an etiquette which had to be observed. One evening, when some German aeroplanes made a raid over our lines, they were

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received with intense "Archie" fire, and started dropping their little souvenirs. Splinters were falling all around. It was a fine night, and everyone came out to enjoy the spectacle. One member of the Mess had put on his "tin hat". He was almost smothered in sarcastic comments, and this example of his caution was quoted as a good joke for days afterwards.

I took many long rides, though I was careful to avoid the danger zones. This was comparatively easy, since the Germans conducted their shoots at fixed hours, or, rather, at more or less fixed intervals. One always knew when one could get by.

A friend of mine had rather a lovely Château in the neighbourhood, at Caulaincourt, and I took it into my head to go and see what it looked like now. Baby and I started out one lovely morning at the beginning of July. I had a good map drawn to a scale of 1-100,000, and it never occurred to me that I could possibly go wrong. I soon learned the contrary. Of a huge farm that had once been there not a vestige remained, and of a largish village, only a few scraps of wall were standing . . . the copses had vanished, and in the wilder woodland no more than an occasional scrap of tree could be seen. Of roads there was not a sign.

I ended by losing myself completely and soon realized that I was to all intents in an unrelieved desert. The sound of shell bursts seemed actually to be following hard on my heels. . . . Was I in "No-Man's-Land"? A short way off I saw a troop of mounted men whose uniforms *looked* grey and whose helmets were not of the shaving-bowl type to which I was accustomed. They had seen me! Gee up, Baby! I wasn't going to fight in shirt sleeves and with no other weapon than a crop against a dozen or so of the enemy's

cavalry. Luckily, I was well ahead of them. I turned aside and put a piece of rising ground between the foe and myself. Changing direction I broke into a gallop . . . and fell—into an ambush? no, but into a Hindu village! What I had taken for a German squadron was no more than a troupe of turbaned Bengal cavalry! All around me were men squatting in oriental fashion . . . others were carrying on their heads huge bundles of forage. Where were the women and children?

Completely reassured, I resumed my search for Caulaincourt. After riding for more than two hours I came at last on a road, a real road. . . . There were fragments of wall, a few houses almost intact, and, at a corner, looking as imperturbable as though he were in Piccadilly, an M.P. ("military policeman" not a "member of Parliament").

He listened to my question as attentively and as calmly as though we had been in a London street.

"Colencort, yessir: first to the right, second to the left, then straight in by a big iron gate."

I thanked him, and took the direction indicated. I saw the Park wall, the big iron gate, and beyond, surprising sight, a fine clump of oaks beneath which a number of horses were tethered. A little further on was a pile of rubbish. But how small it looked! On asking, however, I found that it was, indeed, all that remained of the Château. The Germans had used it for trying out a new explosive. The effect had been shattering, and, since the cellars were deep, the whole building had been lifted bodily into the air and had collapsed in dust into its own foundations.

The weeks passed. There was already talk of a new "show". I went on leave. When I got back I found that the Division was "on the move". I set out to find it, but this was no easy matter in those days of

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secrets (most of them public knowledge). This was what I did.

When I reached Amiens on my return from Paris, the military authorities, French as well as British, professed complete ignorance of the whereabouts of the Third Cavalry Division. By an odd and unfortunate coincidence I knew no civilians there, otherwise I should have got the required information ten times over.

I was advised to telephone. This telephoning of *secret* messages was an odd business. One would be "given" the unit one asked for, but never its position.

I asked for "Cavalry Corps".

"Allo Cavalry Corps."

"Yes."

"French Mission, please."

"..."

"Allo French Mission."

"French Mission speaking."

"Vernon here . . . that you, Poireux?"

"Yes; how goes it?—Just back from leave?"

"Yes . . . but I don't know where to rejoin "Signals", Third Cavalry Division."

"They're at—but I can't tell you over the 'phone."

"I understand. . . . Didn't Louis XI have a spot of bother near where they are?"

"Sure thing."

I don't know why I suddenly thought of that hideous church at Albert which had been half destroyed by gunfire. . . . It had a statue high up, of metal, I think, which was hanging in a horizontal position, and seemed to be looking down at the passers-by.

"Aren't my little lot next door to the King of the Belgians?"

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"Hm . . . not in exactly the same place."

"But not very far off?"

"No."

"Let me see . . . quite close to a young girl?"

"What's that?"

"An extremely chaste young maiden?"

"O.K."

In this way I found my comrades at Suzanne in Picardie, not far from Albert. It had not been an easy job. From there we went to Busnes in Artois.

Here I changed over to the A.S.C. (Army Service Corps) Mess. Not that my duties had altered, but Lord Northbury was no longer in command of "Signals", my original friends were all dispersed, and nothing was left of that pleasant country-house life which I enjoyed in war-time even more than I should have done in peace.

In November came the "Cambrai show". I took no active part in this sterile operation, which might so easily have been turned into success if only the necessary decisions had been taken in time. Proof of this need be sought only in the extraordinary raid carried out by the "Fort Garry Horse", a regiment of Canadian cavalry, which crossed the German trenches after they had been flattened by artillery, routed a regiment of infantry and a battery of guns, and succeeded, *unsupported*, in penetrating to a depth of several kilometres behind the enemy lines. In order to cut their way back, these dashing horsemen made use of a trick worthy of classical times which had been employed during the South African campaign. Naturally there had been pretty heavy casualties, and a number of horses had been left without riders. These they drove in front of them, and so forced a passage through the fire of the infantry which had been hastily reformed.

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If three divisions of cavalry had been available instead of a single regiment, they might have been able to establish themselves in rear of the enemy . . . and . . . but the three divisions had been told to hold up their advance. The Fort Garry Horse alone had never received the order—hence their heroic dash. "There is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous", as Henri Heine said.

The year 1917 drew to a close, and the month of January found us opposite the "Hindenburg Line" at Monchy-Lagache to the South-East of Péronne, in the district which had been so appallingly devastated by the Germans when they carried out their strategic retreat in 1916. It is one of the most fertile parts of France.

The British Staff had the brilliant idea of putting these waste lands under cultivation. As everything the English do involves solid and complicated organization, it was first necessary solemnly to establish a "Board", an administrative body complete with President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer, etc., etc., almost as though another Suez Canal had got to be constructed. The real name of the Colonel who presided over this famous Board I have forgotten, but I remember that he was always known as "Colonel Brasso" because of his perfectly legitimate love of polish (Brasso was a concoction for cleaning brass).

I was made a member of this "Board". Its meetings were conducted with great solemnity and with all due form. Whenever a decision had to be taken, no matter how trivial it might be, the President always asked whether there was anyone present who would "second the proposal". Only then was it put to the vote. All our business was dealt with in this serious manner.

Half a dozen powerful tractors were sent up to

plough the ground. The Germans had collected into "parks" all the agricultural implements they could find, no doubt with the intention of taking them away. Our equipment was drawn from these. We had plenty of men and draught-horses, taken from the transport services . . . the manure being furnished by a whole cavalry division.

Several hundred acres were put under cultivation in the flat country which had once been the scene of the battle of Tertry and of the triumph of Pépin of Heristal over Bertaire the Neustrian. We planted about a hundred acres of potatoes and the same quantity of oats. The sowing completed, the Division was suddenly withdrawn to the rear. I have no reason to suppose that the crops did not mature, but it was doubtless the Germans who had the benefit of them.

As a result of our retirement we had to bivouac in the ruins of Athies. Although we were at no very great distance from the line, I believe our Staff thought we were pretty safe there (it was the 18th of March, 1918), for the "Camp Comedian" asked me to help him to mark out various sports grounds. There had to be one for football, one for polo, and at least two tennis courts. The next horse-show was to be held during the coming Spring. The great idea was to keep the men from being bored. There was talk of a coming German offensive. Well, that would be something to do. . . .

The various "intelligence officers" were naturally well up in all the details of the enemy plans. Not only was the precise zero hour known (2 a.m. on the 21st March), but the German objectives in our sector (Ham-Péronne), the number of effectives engaged, their jumping-off places, the quantity and position of all the enemy batteries, the calibre of the guns. . . . We knew

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so well all the agreed signals, the colour and shape of the tiniest flare, we were so ready, so more than ready, that when zero hour sounded the attack was bound to be smashed.

"Intelligence" was perfectly correct. At two o'clock on the morning of the 21st March a terrific bombardment started, English as well as German. While *they* plastered our trenches, *we* pounded their troops in their jumping-off positions. . . .

About half-past seven there was a lull. . . . The attack had been broken. A short way back everything was perfectly quiet. Some of us were taking our morning tubs, others, still in pyjamas, were shaving: a little further forward the men were at breakfast. We were going to be able to enjoy this 21st March which fully justified its choice as the first day of Spring. A light mist still covered the ground, but overhead the sky was blue. The sun was dissipating what remained of the white veil of vapour, which drifted apart in thin clouds. The birds had once more begun to sing.

How nice it is to feel safe. No one could have felt less so than we did with the line of the Somme and its wide, marshy banks . . . in our rear.

The bridges had recently been doubled by the sappers so as to provide one-way traffic in each direction. On the other side of this obstacle, as far back as Amiens, forty kilometres distant, there was not a single reserve unit in the whole vast plain. Only a few stores and dumps. I knew this from having ridden more than once over the countryside.

The rather attractive mist to which I have referred had not altogether vanished at ground level when a number of shadowy forms became visible.

"Working-party" was one's first mental reaction.

The foremost figures were followed by others, and those by still more.

"What the devil are they doing?"

"What . . . they look dam' like Boches . . . they *are* Boches!"

What a scuttling to the rear! No one was fully dressed, but no one stopped to bother about clothes. . . .

What had happened?

It was only later that we got an answer to that question. The enemy had allowed us to take a number of prisoners at various points of the front, and these prisoners had been instructed to give false information to "Intelligence". Without a word to anyone the sly dogs had then altered all the details of their projected attack, even down to the signals to be used.¹ It certainly was not playing the game! If a green flare was now to have the significance of a red one . . . if two red flares . . . *damn!*

The position of every unit, every battery, every machine-gun group, had been secretly changed. They had been moved to deep shelters, prepared and camouflaged for a long time past in readiness for the occasion.

To make matters worse, when zero hour came the English artillery had pulverized nothing but a lot of empty emplacements, and their machine-guns had swept the front of regiments which were no longer there, while the Germans had blown sky-high our fully-occupied positions. After this preparation, the enemy infantry, organized in great depth, had made a lightning advance, overrunning our trenches and massacring their occupants. In this way they had swept forward over the support line, and were preparing to deal now with the reserves in the same manner. The

¹ This, so far as I know, is a quite new explanation of what happened. Translator's note.

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lull in the bombardment had been due to the fact that the German guns were lengthening their range to cover this further operation. . . . All our own batteries, light and heavy alike, all our machine-guns, even our flying grounds, had been submerged by the advancing hordes before they even knew what was happening. . . . The rest of the defending troops broke and ran. . . .

All this we learned only twenty-four hours later. The fact that Athies did not fall that day was due, I believe, to the fact that the Germans, not realizing the full extent of their success, were deliberately going slow. Had they been able to bring into action a single cavalry division armed with machine-guns, every living soul on the right bank of the Somme would have been captured within a few hours.

As it was we did not move out of Athies until early on the 22nd. The weather was superb. Knowing nothing of the strategic situation, I was inclined to regard this hasty retreat as a pleasant picnic, a not very highly disciplined ride on a fine morning.

We had been told, vaguely, to move on Ham and Noyon. The cry "nach Paris" was, it seemed, to be our directive as well as the Germans.

The roads were chock-full of troops. Here and there one saw a few civilians once more moving back with all their worldly goods, army stragglers, a lot of P.-B. men, and a large number of "labour corps" people, consisting of occasional Italians and a large number of Chinese. Whole gangs of these "Celestials" had been occupied for weeks past in laying out with quite useless neatness what, from their charming regularity, might have been taken for a lot of bowling-greens. These, we were given to understand, were trenches. The engineers who sited them must, I think, have been what we call landscape gardeners. These "trenches"

covered a large extent of ground, and were planned, it seems, on the most scientific principles, but on the day of the attack they were nowhere more than a few inches deep.

I rode with my friend, and superior officer, Billerey, who had passed on to me the order to . . . retire. We were joined, or passed, by a number of isolated horse-men—a vet, a “padre”, a number of individuals belonging to every division in the neighbourhood, all of them in high spirits, none of them “down-hearted”.

Obviously, in order to reach Noyon, we should have to cross the Somme, and for that purpose we must find a bridge. The Germans had not gunned the bridges, knowing that they would have to use them in the course of the pursuit, and the English had been in too great a hurry to think of blowing them up. Consequently, we were able to get across the river without difficulty if not without crowding.

We had to force our way into Ham through a surging mass of troops, civilians, and labour units (both Italian and Chinese), and so on to Noyon with the Germans, alas, hard on our heels.

We were constantly being overtaken by riders from every conceivable British mounted regiment. Each one of them had his contribution to make to the news, and each bit of information was worse than the last—a flying ground occupied without a shot being fired, as early as eight a.m.—one regiment annihilated, another captured almost to a man—this or that battery destroyed before it could come into action. Some said that, otherwise, the situation was satisfactory, others maintained, quite calmly, that it was desperate.

One big fellow there was, mounted on a fine charger, and polished up to the nines as though he were just going on to parade, the strappings of his breeches care-

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fully pipe-clayed, his eyes bright, his red face showing a rather bemused expression (really, there seemed no reason for all this excitement).

"What news?" we asked him.

His childish countenance took on suddenly a tragic mien.

"Worse news than anyone can imagine!"

We looked at one another in terror. . . . The King of England captured? . . . Paris surrendered? . . . Sir Douglas Haig killed? . . .

. . . No! . . . "All the whisky of the Fifth Army has been taken at Prône!"¹

We were speechless at the news of this disaster. I don't know to this day whether he was serious or not . . . English humour?

The further we got from the front, the more appalling became the sights on the road. My dear English friends, when in future you discuss the advisability of organizing farm labour behind a fighting front, please remember what we saw that day—old men (because in France *all* the younger men were fighting), women, children, babies a few months old, some in arms, some being pulled along in wretched little carts—everyone laden with what possessions they had been able to scrape together at the last moment, some begging us to take them with us, women in tears holding up their infants—a heart-breaking, a wholesale, migration . . . and there was nothing we could do. . . .

We reached Noyon in advance of the main body of fugitives. Our point of concentration was Vairesnes, to the south-east of that place.

Noyon! No one who did not see it on 22nd March, 1918, can have any idea of the inefficiency, the incapacity, of the officials of the French Republic!

¹ Péronne.

This was not the only time during the war that I had come up against it. No measures at all, it seemed, had been taken to deal with a possible evacuation.

The town was apparently *en fête*. Easter was near at hand, and the inhabitants were all preparing to have a good time. The streets were full of high-spirited and confident crowds. The women had taken advantage of the fine weather to show off their Spring dresses. . . . The authorities had done nothing to warn the people of the probable arrival of the Germans within a few hours. Actually, the enemy was but thirty kilometres off. At any moment the place might be bombarded: in a very little while it might be occupied.

Charming Noyon, and its marvellous Cathedral, was still, at that time, intact. I saw it again in 1919!

When I passed the post-office it was full of pretty "war-godmothers" busy sending picture-postcards to their boy-friends at the front—Oh! *so far away*, somewhere near St. Quentin. . . .

I posted two important letters. They arrived next day in Paris, duly censored, so undisturbed was the peaceful routine of war!

We passed the night at Varesnes, a small village which had been destroyed, I think, way back in 1914, sheltering in the ruins, ready to "stand to" at a moment's warning, the horses kept saddled. All round us were batteries which kept up an incessant fire.

There was one tragi-comic episode. We were called upon to make a midnight dash in order to rescue—the band instruments of an English infantry battalion, and load them on to a lorry. It was our one taste of glory throughout a night of agony.

Dawn found us shivering a bit and waiting to deliver a counter-attack which never materialized. . . . Indeed, so far from being called upon, we received

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orders to move still further South, "nach Paris" as ever. We made across open country for Carlepont, where the confusion of traffic was terrifying. I was still labouring under the fear of seeing the enemy cavalry put in a sudden appearance. There was an enormous crowd of us, we were more or less defenceless, and we were hampered by an indescribable conglomeration of rubbish. Such a disorganized mob would have been quite incapable of offering the slightest resistance, and things were made more difficult by the carts, horses and lorries with which we were encumbered. The infantry units, or rather the scattered remnants of such units, had lost the greater part of their rifles, though the men were all carefully shaved. The mounted troops, too, were clean, their horses groomed, and their accoutrements without any sign of rust.

As to my officer companions—they just went on placidly discussing how the war could be continued.

"Everything is all right. We have got reserves and ammunition" . . . said some; and others—

"We are beat (*sic*). What's the use of going on?"

The ground was covered with articles of every description left lying there because they had been found an encumbrance. Walking along a forest road with good Colonel Cumming, I noticed first one, then two, sandbags, and finally a heap, just lying there, though they were clearly stuffed full of something. We opened a few to see what the contents might be. It consisted of magnificent hams. The English would have done well to read an old pamphlet which I possess entitled "*Lessons of Thrift*". I doubt whether the war and its unbelievable wastage of food and munitions has taught them anything. (Incidentally, my batman always used to get rid of my things half-used, even throwing away

my soap when he considered that the cake had become too small. . . .) Let me add, in parenthesis, that many poor people in France lived, in those days, off tins of meat, margarine or jam, flung aside half empty by the "Tommies". . . .

We spent another night "standing to", but this time rather further to the south. Was the objective of Gough's Army really to be Paris? But while we moved southward, other troops were going north—French this time.

The countryside was so congested that our column had the greatest difficulty in moving as it had been directed to do, which was by way of Tracy-le-Val, Ollencourt, Tracy-le-Mont, with Compiègne as its final destination. Luckily we had the line of the Oise between the enemy and ourselves. It looked as though we were going to make doubly sure by adding that of the Aisne to it.

Lieutenant A, who had been told the route to follow, kept on gloomily saying: "I am damned if I know where to find the damned place. I've got no map."

The last maps issued to us had been those of the St. Quentin district, where we had been planning an advance before the precipitate retirement on Compiègne had been foreseen. Realizing the lieutenant's hopeless bewilderment, a certain Captain, Lisle by name, had a bright idea.

"Vernon", he said, turning to me; "of course you know this country, it's yours"(which was rather simplifying the problem. It was as though he had said to an Englishman, "Look here, you're a Londoner, therefore, of course, you can show me the way through Birmingham")—"you lead the column"; and, in a lower voice—"that fellow's such a bloody fool, he'll never be able to find the way."

CAMPING

Rather frightened by my new responsibility, I took over the column. . . . I had heard the name of Choisy-au-Bac, and concluded from that ancient-sounding title that it must mark the position of a bridge over the Aisne.

Like Bayard at Garigliano, like Buonaparte at Arcola, perhaps I was destined to make history at another bridge, and with such thoughts in my head I proceeded to head my men towards Choisy-au-Bac. It was to be next day before I reached it.

Please don't think that it was easy to move freely where one wished. The roads, both main and secondary, were so congested that several détours were necessary, and one was forever losing one's way in village lanes or forest paths.

What on earth was I to do without a map! Next morning a providential inspiration put me in the way of finding one. I had noticed a keeper's lodge in the forest through which we were moving. There, thought I, we might be able to pick up some information about the roads that were still practicable, or, at least, find the general direction which we ought to take. There was no one at home but a lame old man, whose information was about as useful as himself. . . . Still, I did manage to get hold of an almanack measuring about five by nine inches, on the back of which was a small map of the whole Department of the Oise. It was to this almanack that a section of the British Army owed its salvation!

Since orders and counter-orders were following hard on one another's heels, our progress was not rapid. We spent the 26th, 27th, and 28th March wandering about in the Forest of Compiègne, on the *safe* side of the Aisne, and that marked the furthest extreme point of our advance on Paris.

We breathed again, if I may so put it. News had come in that the Boches were bombarding Paris. The battle, therefore, would be fought out above our heads, and we should get only a few scattered odds and ends. What most troubled us were the presents left by the enemy aeroplanes and, naturally, by our own anti-aircraft guns. The impartiality of these latter weapons is well known.

The love of sport is never wholly absent from the mind of your true Englishman. Thus, in the course of those inglorious days which saw us moving from Compiègne, back through Saint-Just and Conty towards Amiens, it was not altogether surprising to hear a Major of the Cavalry Corps who happened to run across my friend Poireux saying, without any reference to the misfortunes of war—

“I say, Poireux, don’t forget to let me know when the May-fly comes to Butort.”

Being myself unskilled in matters of angling, I found out in this way that the appearance of the May-fly is the signal for opening hostilities—against the trout.

During all this time we were involved in the bloody fighting which developed round Moreuil and Montdidier. Shortly afterwards, the front became stabilized. We stayed for some time east of Amiens, and later, in the neighbourhood of Arras and Béthune, where we passed the months of April, May, June and July. We fetched up finally at Yseux, near Picquigny, on the Somme, where we stood by in readiness for the next offensive.

Our impression at that time was that the war might well go on for another ten years, at the end of which period we might have received sufficient in the way of rations, ammunition, and American reinforcements.

CAMPING

The Government of the French Republic had declined the advantageous offer of a separate peace with Austria, preferring, apparently, to see another half-million men killed, to countenancing the continued, though powerless, existence of a Catholic Monarchy. . . . That, presumably, was why the war went on.

Twice every day we were bombed by aircraft. That, however, did nothing to interfere with our horse-shows, our polo, and our racing.

It was at this time that I won the two most memorable races of my career as a "gentleman rider".

The first was with a horse which had been "found", i.e. stolen, by a batman of Whimbrel's (the spindle-shanked collector of detonators). It was an extraordinary animal, half draught, half saddle, broad-backed, with a rough coat, which made my pals laugh when they saw me so mounted. I was the only officer who knew anything about it, having tried it out galloping and jumping. It would stand up to anything, was full of guts, and amazingly willing.

One day, when the colonel was pulling my leg about him, I issued a challenge, offering to take him on over a thousand yards. We started off over rough fields covered with patchy grass, and I won easily by three heads.

The other race was run by this same Colonel Cumming riding a fine polo pony, Captain Lisle on a light-weight half-bred, and me, mounted on a horse lent by the A.D.M.S. This latter was a great big fellow with a weakness for heavy chargers. He had noticed in the waggon-lines a regular mastodon of a beast, well-built, but measuring at least thirteen hands and weighing anything between thirteen hundred and fifteen hundred pounds! Once on his back, however, he found that he had a nice turn of speed. It was the A.D.M.S. who

had organized this particular race with the object of testing the qualities of his new "remount". In all reasonable probability, the Colonel, weighing no more than 110 lbs., should have won easily on his polo pony. The distance was of one mile, measured on the race-course (there was always a race-course) of Picquigny. The pace at the start was not particularly hot.... I had made up my mind to occupy an honourable place in the rear, as honourable as possible, but in any case not to press my "monument". For half the distance, therefore, I was behind the two others, and kept this position until we were within about two hundred yards of the finishing post. The pace had been gradually increasing. At this point Captain Lisle began using his whip and drew slightly ahead. The Colonel put his pony all out and started to catch up on him. Feeling my own mount to have plenty of go left in him and to be in no way blown, I pressed hard on the other two and won easily by two heads.

Was it really a saddle-horse who had got among the draught animals by mistake? I don't think so. But if he was a fair sample of his kind, there is nothing to be surprised at that by crossing with thoroughbreds the English can produce those remarkable heavy-weights which are the envy of all French riders of fourteen stone and over, since they can carry fifteen at racing speed and over formidable obstacles . . . for two hours at a time. . . .

CHAPTER ELEVEN

VICTORY

THE rumours of a coming offensive which had been vaguely circulating for some time, began to take on a new precision. This time it was to be no question of a mere "gap", but of a serious forward "movement". Troops and guns filled every road. How far should we get this time? Would it be just a repetition of Arras?

Since I was to be attached to B Échelon it seemed unlikely that I should see anything at all. Luckily, one of my colleagues, a valiant fighter—in words—was only too glad to exchange places with me, and even went so far as to provide a horse for my orderly. I remembered how, at Arras, I had been told to make myself comfortable, and though I was anxious to have some experience of danger, I wanted to do so comfortably, like all English officers, that is to say, complete with groom and a valet.

In a mood of feverish excitement I got my kit ready, paying special attention to food. That done, I spent my last day sleeping, since we had been told that we should be marching all night.

OLD ENGLAND

We left Pont de Metz, a suburb of Amiens, at ten p.m. Our silent departure by the light of the stars was mysterious and impressive. This time everybody seemed to be taking the business seriously. Was this to be grim war at last? Should I see a genuine battle? I had been issued with a British service revolver. I tried over its mechanism and loaded it. I was a little uneasy about the weight that my horse would have to carry. My new mount was more sturdy than poor Baby, who had been killed by German machine-gun bullets while she was being ridden by an officer of the Royal Engineers, who had fallen at the same time.

The staggering load for a normal cavalry charger is about 264 lbs. Mine was asked to carry rather less than that.

I reckoned my chances of coming alive through a victorious advance. This offensive seemed to my (civilian) mind well-timed. It came when the Germans had exhausted both men and munitions in the March attack which, as things turned out, had been ultimately held.

The Allied effectives were four or five times more numerous than those of the enemy. This proportion, given the daily arrival of innumerable American troops, would soon work out at seven to one. Our superiority in munitions, and, especially, in food, was overwhelming.

The war was to prove that the better man was he who could rely on numbers, both in men and munitions. The Germans won in the early days and crushed our resistance, because of their superiority in effectives. The French drove them back at the first battle of the Marne because the Germans were weakened as a result of having to send several divisions to deal with the Russians in East Prussia. They had

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been once more successful when they had been able to outnumber us on the Somme. They had attacked before the Americans could make their weight felt. These were now serving in the line, and their reserves were arriving in colossal quantities. Our victory, therefore, was inevitable. The heroism of the English, and particularly of the French, armies had consisted in holding out far longer than could have been expected against an enemy superior in numbers and material. It was now the turn of the Germans to play a similar part, but their position was hopeless, because they no longer had anything *behind* them.

It was "a long, long way" before we reached our jumping-off positions. Time rather than distance was the cause of this, for we moved slowly. We had to march round the outskirts of Amiens before we could reach the open country. There was very little talking, but for all that our progress was accompanied by a continuous sound as of the tide sweeping over a sandy shore. Endless columns were moving on parallel lines through the night. We none of us knew where we were; all we could do was to follow those in front and be careful not to lose contact with them. It was all very solemn, very secret, and rather nerve-racking. A strange "midsummer night's dream".

The scents of the wonderful summer darkness were submerged in the mingled smells of war—of men and horses, of leather and of metal. The silence was occasionally broken by the snort of a horse or the muttering sound of a lorry engine.

No "cavalry track" this time. The roads looked vague and mysterious in the pale light of the stars. The sound of our movement seemed to extend indefinitely to right and left. Here and there the outline of trees intensified the blackness of the night. The

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further we went the less sure could I be of the direction in which we were moving.

Now and again we passed huge shapes like monsters from the Book of Revelation. A clanking noise came from within them. Their vast outlines made blots of deeper shadow in the general obscurity. These enormous snail-like objects had different names according to size. The largest were known, pacifically, as "tanks"; the smaller as "whippets". We were told that the "tanks" were slower than the "whippets", but, oddly enough, that they were better at surmounting obstacles.

No less strange were the silhouettes which we saw at intervals of huge guns perched uncomfortably on their carriages.

How it was that all these various columns did not become inextricably confused I shall never know. One must admit that the organization of this secret (!) march was perfect.

There was something threatening in the very quietness of the night. Not a gun-shot, not a single explosion, came to break the peace. What did it all mean? Would a rain of shells suddenly descend upon us? It did not come. On and on went this eerie "Pilgrims's Progress". For how many hours? The almost complete silence in which we moved, the utter peacefulness, set our nerves on edge.

Suddenly there was a sharp order, heard only with difficulty. We halted. We had arrived. But where? Why? The columns dispersed, seeming to melt into the dry ground. We were told to dismount. I handed my horse over to Ponton and joined Billerey. We soon had a group of friends about us. What were we to do? Nothing . . . wait . . . wait for zero hour, for the signal to attack. We regulated our watches so as

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not to be caught napping. It was only midnight. Zero hour was four a.m. . . .

Dados was there, the A.P.M. and several officers I did not recognize. Some lay down, trying to snatch a wink of sleep, others stood about munching biscuit. Ponton was already sleeping the sleep of the just, the horses' bridles festooned round his arm. We were on a gentle rise, which was quite bare except for a few patches of shadow. I visited several of these: they were shelters dug in the earth and covered with camouflage. In each of them were men sleeping.

I tried to do likewise, following, in that, the example of all great generals on the eve of a battle. But I was not a great general, and would what we were waiting for turn out to be a battle? At Arras, everyone had talked about the "gap", we all knew what it would be like . . . and it had falsified all our expectations. "And we didn't gap at all. . . ." . . . But this time? . . . Well, one could always munch chocolate and biscuit, and peer about trying to find out where we were. The spot where we had halted lay between Saint-Nicolas and Glisy. Somewhere near at hand lay "Dgentel Wood" (of course, Bois de Gentelles!). That, doubtless, would be our general direction. All our interminable wandering through the darkness had resolved itself into a march of no more than seven or eight miles. Seven or eight miles, but all those halts, all that getting under way again, had made it seem much more. . . . It was something, of course, but at that rate it would take us a considerable time to reach the Rhine. . . .

I found out at long last that the concentration of troops of which we formed part consisted of three cavalry divisions and five hundred tanks. Two divisions less than we had been at Arras, though, to be sure, the tanks were extra. I did not know whether a

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cavalry track would be prepared as on the last occasion. It would have to be a pretty large one. With all these mechanical monsters some Victor Hugo in fifty years' time would be able to speak of "a moving earthquake", for by that time no doubt poets would be singing the glory of machines.

I decided to sleep if I could, since next day we might all be dead.

*To die, to sleep,
To sleep, perchance, to dream.*

And what a night for dreams! Away with the gloomy Prince of Denmark. It was a summer's night; a night in August, a night made for love, eh? sweet ghost of Musset. . . .

*Et je veux raconter et répéter sans cesse
Qu'après avoir juré de vivre sans maîtresse,
J'ai fait serment de vivre et de mourir d'amour.*

Two o'clock; three o'clock. What power had slowed the moving hours? This night of stars had become a corner of eternity.

*". . . In such a night as this
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees . . ."*

Then . . . Troilus met his Cressida, and Jessica stole away to join Lorenzo. . . .

Still an hour to go . . . forty minutes . . . thirty. Would there be a glorious charge this time? I was with the English. Did any of us really know why we were fighting or to what end? Already we might have had an inkling . . . for the triumph of Communism, for the peace would be even stupider than the war. . . .

Three forty-five. Here and there figures began to move, but all was silence still. The darkness was

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thinner. One could begin to distinguish objects. What had been shapeless an hour ago took on definite form. We were surrounded by camouflaged batteries.

"Vernon!"

"Yes?"

"Five minutes more. . . ."

"Yes . . . what have we got to do?"

"Nothing . . . wait for orders."

Two more minutes . . . one. . . .

A blinding flash, a hideous uproar. Close at hand the signal had been given to start what was to be a battle, a long, long battle. It was to last from the 8th August until the 11th November almost without interruption. On that latter day the Allies would have won the war and be on the point of losing the peace.

We had no time to think of all that. Ten times, a hundred times, a thousand, the air around us was rent with flame. We felt as though we were just part of a general explosion.

An order at last! Mount! Dawn was breaking, and from the hill on which we stood we could see an immense plain alive, it seemed, with movement. Masses of cavalry were riding forward. An ant-heap swarming as far as eye could see, and, in the middle of it, great swaying, clumsy reptiles—the tanks.

At a trot, then at a gallop, we moved off down the slope to Gentelles and then on to Cachy, which we reached in a cloud of dust, so dry was the ground. Hills and valleys alike were echoing with noise and alive with movement.

The German guns were now replying. Our own batteries were behind us; we had ridden right through them. Was this a barrage? I had no idea. By this time the bursts seemed less frequent, and we were still advancing.

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We slowed down: so great was the congestion that we could not do otherwise. As far as the eye could reach a vast crowd was moving solidly in the same direction—towards the East.

Formations overlapped and became confused. The roads were blocked by guns, ammunition lorries and tanks. The air was thick with noise, smoke, dust and confusion. We were like some barbarian horde rushing into battle. I rode to the top of a hill from which I got a still more thrilling view of the scene. The very earth seemed in movement, enveloped in great clouds. What, a moment or two before, had looked dusty grey was now touched by the rising sun to gold and purple. The effect was quite Turneresque.

I stood there perhaps ten seconds watching this magnificent picture... but even that was too long. The golden fog had hidden my companions from me. What unit was this?—not even my dear Third Division, but the Second.

We halted, then moved off again. Trenches appeared. We scrambled across them as best we could. A sort of bastion or strong-point loomed up in the mist: we took it. Nothing could stop our progress.

But at this precise moment the advance came to a standstill. I found my own Division, my own friends. What was happening? Faces wore an anxious look. Was the show over? Was it to be just a repetition of the Arras "gap"?

On all sides we could hear tac-tac-tac. Our machine-guns? No, German. Had we ridden into a trap? Tac-tac-tac. There was a general air of nervousness.

But it was no trap. The German defence was being organized into a leisurely rearguard action. The infantry was carrying out a methodical retirement, leaving behind nests of machine-guns, the crews of which

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would have to make their way back, if they could, at the last moment. This game went on all day. The advance developed into a succession of dashes broken by sudden halts each time that it was held up by invisible machine-guns. Aeroplanes flew low, trying to spot them. Our artillery, with a superiority in weight and ammunition of twenty to one, corrected their aim and proceeded to silence the machine-guns to which our own were replying. Forward again. An hour later, another hold-up, with all the business of spotting and shelling repeated. And so it went on.

For the moment we were in "dead ground", and everything coming from in front passed safely over our heads. Suddenly an aeroplane appeared bearing quickly down on us. I was not particularly fond of that kind of visitor. German? English?—It was English. Flying very low it dropped a surprise packet of many colours. A joke?—no, a brightly wrapped container which fell almost at my feet. It contained information which I passed on to an officer, and he to another.

I felt quite happy now that, thanks to a recent halt, I had come up with Billerey and my other friends.

Prisoners. They must be questioned. It so happened that "Intelligence" was nowhere to be seen, and there was not an officer at hand who knew a single word of German. I was told to do the necessary. The prisoners, I must admit, were only too anxious to make themselves understood. They gave me the names of their regiments and of those in support. That done, I had no idea what to ask them. If I had been in their place what should I have known of the general conduct of the operations? I used them to carry back the wounded. With four to a man we made quick progress, and I soon had a useful squad of bearers.

What was the time? Long past midday. The advance slowed down, and then came to a final halt. We dismounted and took a welcome bit of lunch. Then we moved off again, more slowly, on foot, the grooms leading the horses. No need to hurry since the Boche shells were falling well behind us. Good! that proved that we had been moving forward more quickly than they guessed.

Let it never be said that a "show" could be staged without some kind of unpleasant surprise. We were halted along the line of a bank which we thought offered complete protection. But suddenly shells began to burst uncomfortably near, and the whine of bullets seemed a good deal too low for my ease of mind.

A regular game of hide and seek followed. Since the bursts were moving in the same line as ourselves, were, so to speak, dogging our steps, we had to reverse our direction. The movement was highly necessary; it took the form of a dance, of what is known as "setting to partners". The "camp comedian" showed himself also to be a "camp dancer"—or, let us say, a "*show* dancer". We followed his lead as best we could, scattered over the ground, and still on foot. Had we moved *towards* the barrage we should doubtless have got through it quicker. The awkward thing about *that*, however, was that at some point or other we should have had to meet the damned thing. Many brave fellows, alas, and horses, too, found that out to their cost. These are details on which I do not insist. Plenty of others have written about the purely military aspects of the war.

At last we were through the danger zone. The August sun was already low on the horizon. Everyone was exhausted, even the guns on both sides, and their fire became more and more desultory.

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We halted again, this time, I thought, for the night. News began to come in. It was excellent. Our advance had reached an average depth of from six to seven miles. We were holding a line east of Cayeux and Beaucourt.

This 8th of August was the first entirely happy day we had known for a long while. No one, that morning, would have dared to hope that we had given the signal for the final advance, had seen the dawn of victory: no one could have guessed that we were launching a move-ment which would stop only with the armistice.

"Splendid advance," said a little, fat, red-faced Staff Officer, a "red tape",¹ who had just turned up—in a voice of triumph. He was to form part of our little group, for Billerey and I were now attached to the Staff. He was in charge of the horses belonging to the senior officers.

Darkness came quickly. The stars were shining brightly, for the offensive had been timed for a series of moonless nights. We lay down where we were, our helmets taking the place of the wooden pillows which the Ancient Egyptians had been in the habit of using. Once more I must try to sleep. . . . *In such a night! . . .*

SSS. SSS. SSS. SSS.

Muted music, now soft, now sharp, a few feet above our heads. I heard the fat little "red tape" stirring close by. SSS. SSS—A burst not far off—then another.

"Vernon!" My companion's voice sounded less triumphant now than when he was talking about the "splendid advance".

"Vernon!"

"Yes?"

"Vernon! They are shelling us!"

¹ So, our author. Translator's note.

"I *know* that."

Silence again. A further series of SSS, SSS—followed by several explosions uncomfortably close.

"Vernon, they are shelling us!"

The voice was now furious, and the speaker seemed to have a grudge against me.

"Can't help it. . . ."

Silence. More gentle whispers in the air above, ending in shattering bursts.

My companion took up the old tale:

"Vernon! they are shelling us. We must move!"

"Where?"

"I don't know. I *hate* that!"

"So do I."

I remarked that very few people really liked it, adding, to Billerey, that I saw no point in moving since the shells were falling well beyond us.

"What's he want to do?"

"Nothing. He's got the wind up."

There was nothing we could do. Finally, the guns got tired of firing in our direction. The shells began falling somewhere else. So much the better. Had we moved we might have found ourselves in the middle of them.

Suddenly we were roused: orders. Another attack? now, in the middle of the night? No!—just a question of watering the horses down by "Cayeux Wood". I had noticed, as a matter of fact, on the map that a small stream, the Lice, ran right through the wood in question.

We got into the saddle again. It was some distance off, but—"it will be a change. . . ." Off we set in the dark night. On all sides were riders who had received the same orders as ourselves. We had to wait a long time for our turn at the watering place. It came at

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last, and our splendid animals could at last quench their thirst after the long day of sun and dust. The dear things drank deep and slowly.

We had lost our mounted acquaintances from the Staff, and most of our friends had wandered away in all directions. We were soon alone on what we took to be our right road.

The sky was thick with stars... nothing more poetic could well be imagined than this ride of ours through the darkness.... But how were we to find our way back?... My instinct, trained by much hacking home from meets, often after dark, was pretty sure.... Besides, horses have a good nose for the stable.... In a little while, and without any difficulty, I saw a hedge loom up ahead, and told Billerey that it must be the point from which we had set out: nor was I wrong.

"Pon—ton."

"Yessir."

We were back safely enough, and there was my fat friend with the red tabs, no longer excited now that the shelling had slackened off.

We lay down once more—to dream of love adventures past and to come, of the "godmother" perhaps, who had sent a photograph of herself in deliciously scanty clothing, posed in a garden. It was scarcely to be hoped that I was her first conquest; indeed, the odds were that the picture had been taken by another of her "adopted boys". Oh, well, polygamy is an accepted fact in war-time. It is generally assumed if not generally admitted.

I was half woken from my doze by a sound of grumbling which ended with the words "——g bastard" (a form of abuse confined to the private soldier and never employed by officers). It was

addressed to a horse which had tugged at its bridle, and so jerked awake the soldier who was lying with it looped about his arm.

I fell asleep once again and did not wake until morning broke fresh and sunny. This time it was an angel who roused me—my guardian angel, Ponton.

"Want some tea, sir?"

The good fellow knew that food was an essential consideration in time of war. Besides, early morning tea was a ritual which must be observed whatever happened. To miss one's early morning tea would be a sort of blasphemy, like forgetting to shave.

"Some biscuit, sir?"

The biscuit completed the rousing process, and I felt fresh, ready for anything, and in an excellent temper.

Nevertheless, shave I must: it was the first duty of an English soldier, the thing that must be done at once on waking. Any orders? No. What were the others doing? Shaving. On that point there was complete unanimity. Ponton had brought me a mug of hot water, and I extracted the necessary implements from my pack.

"Fine morning, sir."

Three words! three only, but they contained the essence of British humour. A Frenchman might have said a good many things—but never that. Those words—"Fine morning, sir", were probably the most typically English of anything I had heard in the whole course of the war. What philosophy, what wisdom, what an expression of good temper! An English Jesuit, named Faber, has written a whole chapter "on kindness", in which he explains that amiability and politeness are, of all virtues, the most truly Christian. It follows, then, that the English are more Christian than any other people.

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Let me here interrupt for a moment my hymn to the "glories of the battlefield", remembering the wise saying of Boileau that "boredom is bred of a day without variety", and vary my martial tale—"just for a change". For, as that great and misunderstood genius Abélard once said in writing to Saint Bernard about the alteration of a word in the "Pater Noster"—"Such changes in Divine worship have a certain charm, since, in the words of Cicero, uniformity is the mother of satiety."

Politeness! A smile, a cup of tea, a few comments about the beauty of the day! Ponton had realized that a let-up from heroism is sometimes necessary. That "make yourself comfortable" of the "Camp comedian" had been own brother to the "fine morning, sir", with its accompanying cup of tea.

Politeness!—such a precious gift, and the thing above all others that makes life in the Unknown Isle so sweet. The Paris taxi-driver either insults you or says nothing if he thinks his tip too small. In London, he probably remarks—"You are not very generous" or "a little more would please me very much". To be sure (I think I have said this already) there are very few genuine Frenchmen left, while quite a number of true-bred Englishmen are still to be found.

I have interrupted my tale of war. But what follows will prove even more conclusively that an impassable gulf separates us from the English. *We* take everything seriously, even war. *They* take nothing seriously except those endless little amenities that make life worth living. When it comes down to brass tacks, the occasions on which one can make a display of heroism are few and far between.

A new day was before me, and I was to engage in that "liaison dangereuse" which I had always thought would be my main duty as an interpreter.

"Vernon!"

"Hullo!..."

"They're sending you to make liaison with the French."

"Good! Perhaps now we shall begin to understand them!"

Another illusion, for I was to find on reaching the area where the French language held sway, that I understood just nothing at all.

Billerey explained that we were to carry certain messages, written as well as verbal, to Head-Quarters of the Nth French Division, which was supposed to be marching parallel with us on the other side of the Amiens-Roye road. We were to go on horseback, our grooms following. It would be an interesting experience to compare English and French methods of conducting a battle. The English army (we) was advancing between Caix and Quesnel, the French towards Fresnoy and Hangest.

I made sure that my horse was in good fettle, went over details of accoutrement and weapons (!), and a little later there we were, trotting across the broken ground, yesterday so full of movement, now quiet and empty.

One could not help wondering what had happened to all the troops who had been there so recently. They had been concentrated, had, one might almost say, gone to earth, in the most inconspicuous places they could find where they were now waiting, doubtless, for the next order to attack. The artillery was firing away conscientiously. That, after all, was its job. The guns, I noticed, were all in the open where they made an impressive show of all calibres, busy creating as much noise as they could, but eliciting little, if any, reply. The biggest had got their muzzles tilted upwards as though they were aiming at the moon.

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Everything was in apple-pie order. The prisoners, presumably, had been shut away, the wounded evacuated, the dead buried. All one could see were a few dead horses and disabled tanks—eloquent of the same sad helplessness.

The ground, covered with shell-holes and empty trenches, was broken indeed. The further we got into the French area the fewer living creatures there were to be seen. I even got the impression that, this time, there really was a "gap", but a "gap" between the two allied armies. Operations here were what the history books call a "regular walk-over". We had advanced without meeting so much as one enemy to kill.

When we had left the last of the English batteries behind us, we went on for a long time without meeting anybody. We heard the sound of guns—French, no doubt, but in far smaller numbers than our own, though we could see nothing of them.

It was soon borne in on us that we were in a different world, almost in a different century. It was quite exciting, after much searching, to tumble on the Head-Quarters of a French Division.

We had left a group of Staff Officers happily enjoying an early morning picnic in the shade of a tree—a sort of "jamboree" of overgrown boy scouts, all very gay and pleasant. . . . Now we had reached a point where we had to leave our horses and scramble over ruins. Finally we descended a staircase leading into the bowels of the earth, and, in the cellar of a demolished house lit by a few candles, found the officers of the Staff we were looking for, gathered round a few tins of sardines and bottles of wine. Conversation was conducted in whispers: the atmosphere was one of unrelieved gloom. . . . We delivered our message to the General. In return he entrusted to us several of his

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own, and after noting their gist we returned by the way we had come without incident. Our trip had been accompanied, naturally, by a little "music", but no harm had been done. "Much Ado about Nothing."

That same evening we did some more liaison work, and with the same ease as before. I couldn't help feeling that there was less "glory" about than there had been the day before. Everyone seemed worn out, in "France", if I may so phrase it, as in "England".

The gunners, especially the English ones, kept up their pandemonium. One was used to it by this time. The Germans were playing the same game as on the previous day, but in a more concentrated form. They opened a lively fire (especially from scattered machine-guns) which continued for about twenty minutes and then stopped, to begin again about half an hour later on a line a little further to the rear. The pauses in their activity synchronized with short, sharp dashes on our part which carried us forward a few hundred yards. When they opened up again we stopped and went to ground until our artillery had succeeded in silencing them. At this rate it would take us a good many months to reach Berlin!

On either side of the Amiens-Roye road the result of the day's operations were approximately the same. South of that line the troops had had some difficulty in occupying Fresnoy-en-Chaussée, and this fact had rather worried the French commander. The English, on the contrary, whose advance had been no deeper, were delighted—although the sum total of ground gained during the day was no more than the distance separating Cayeux from Caix—about three kilometres! . . . Little enough in all conscience, but it was all a matter of temperament. To be pleased with what one has done is part of the English make-up, and

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in matters of fighting, is due to the fact that England has had to wage no major war since 1815, whereas we French have had a succession of hard knocks. Five invasions since 1792.

We spent the night between Cayeux and Caix, to an accompaniment of the same sort of music as before. But there was less wandering about in the open. We managed to water the horses close by. The night was disturbed by those detestable contraptions which, I was told, were of Austrian origin. When they fired they made an easily recognizable sound, and plastered the neighbourhood with "souvenirs" of every description, big and little. They went by the name of "high velocity guns". What I chiefly had against them was that they made it impossible for us to sleep in the open. We had to get down into shell-holes and filthy trenches. . . .

My dear, red-faced friend on the Staff began telling me that it wasn't "healthy" to sleep there, and proceeded to settle down on top. He hadn't been there ten minutes when a nice little shower of keepsakes descended on his head. He took a huge jump and landed plumb on the bottom of my shell-hole, quite unhurt, by the Grace of God, while I got a lump of metal on my tin hat which I had been coward enough to keep on my head. . . .

The night was rather too noisy for my taste, and was certainly not conducive to pleasant dreams. Things quietened down later, however, and the concert stopped entirely just as dawn was flushing the eastern sky. I don't much like those sudden stoppages, for they usually mean some sort of forward movement, and one is never sure whether it is *we* or *they* who are making it.

The sun climbed rapidly, and very soon it was in-

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tolerably hot in the airless hole in which we were taking cover. It was the morning of the 10th August.

We all met for a gay breakfast in a pleasant grove of oaks—Billerey, I, little "Dados" and the big "Apeeam". These officers instructed me in a piece of ritual which is, I gather, traditional in the British Army—the greeting of each shell that comes over with a nod of the head. Similarly, one should never light three cigarettes from the same match! If one does, it is bad luck, so it seems! . . . Such a lot of things are bad luck! . . .

We proceeded to enjoy the magnificent sight which lay before us—a fine battle picture not so very unlike those that have been left us by Van der Meulen and Meissonnier.

We ourselves were placed in the left-hand corner of the canvas, where we appeared as a picturesque group seated on a hillock. Round about were a number of bushes, and, in the background, a wood. The ground descended in an easy slope towards the right of the picture, where stood a number of orderlies, pennons flying in the breeze, holding the officers' horses by the bridles. The centre of the picture was occupied by a glittering group of officers in shiny equipment, surveying the battle below them—the General Staff. They were comfortably installed in a half-dug trench, the parapet of which they were using as a table, and had maps spread before them. Some were bending over these, while others were busy looking through their glasses.

They were impeccably turned out. Most of them were wearing caps with broad red bands, their helmets slung on their backs. With their light wash-leather gloves, their admirable boots and breeches, they stood there, upright, elegant, perfectly correct. They were

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the last representatives of the soldier in "lace and ruffles". Just beyond them, at the foot of the hill, two splendid squadrons stood drawn up in mass formation as though ready to charge. All around the guns were firing without a pause, filling the sunny scene with clouds of smoke and stabs of flame.

I felt that I could gaze for ever at the brilliant spectacle without wearying of it. Suddenly I was sent for by General Harman in person. What an honour! The day of my glory had dawned! I was to be sent off alone on some mission, since my friend Billerey had already been despatched on another. . . .

By my own unaided efforts I should have to find my way through the confusion of the battle and, at all costs, seek out the ever-shifting head-quarters of the French commander. The message was a verbal one. There must be nothing in writing in case of an accident. I can now reveal the secret with which I was entrusted. While the French were debouching from Fresnoy in the direction of Hangest, Quesnel and Beaufort would be attacked by the Canadian Brigade. If, in the course of my ride, I saw that Le Quesnel had been taken, I was to announce the fact to the French.

I was filled with a feeling of excitement and hope—hope that I might be able to bring off some such (easy) success as that which had fallen to the lot and redounded to the credit of our friend N. . . . no longer ago than the previous day. Taking advantage of a halt, N, for purposes purely personal to himself, had gone into a wood, where, having advanced no more than thirty paces or so, he had found himself surrounded by at least a dozen German soldiers. Amazement kept him rooted to the spot. He could almost *feel* the twelve bullets piercing his body . . . when, contrary to everything he expected, twenty-four arms were raised

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simultaneously in token of surrender. . . . Restraining with heroic determination the urgent claims of nature, N. . . . collected his Huns and, with a magnificent gesture, indicated the path they were to take. Revolver in hand he brought up the rear, and delivered in triumph to his Colonel a covey of prisoners who, by that time, looked rather like a group of disaffected "natives" who had been rounded up by a member of the Foreign Legion and were begging for mercy. What a picture!

For this he had been recommended for the D.C.M.!

One should be surprised at nothing in time of war. . . . But this by the way. Let me get back to my story.

I had set off hard on the heels of the "Fort Garry Horse", who were carrying out the attack on Quesnel. But, as it turned out, I had to go a great deal further. Leaving them on my left I soon found myself in the only too familiar landscape of confused shell-holes and hummocks, craters, smashed trenches, overturned tanks, disabled guns, and the bodies of men and horses. The pandemonium produced by the huge "nine point two's" and their like was at its height. They were drawn up in long lines with scarcely any attempt at concealment.

In a very short time I reached the road which marked the limit of our sector. Beyond it lay the French. At this point it ran along a causeway which dominated a plain on which, as soon as I had left the crowded British scene behind me, not a soul was to be seen. Instead of guns standing wheel to wheel there was nothing visible at all. An impressive silence lay over the countryside broken by the sound of an occasional shell-burst.

I took my bearings and set off at a trot in what I

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supposed was the direction of Fresnoy. I had just reached a small wood when a furious voice issuing, apparently from beneath the earth, addressed me in terms which my insufficient knowledge of English make it impossible for me to translate. All I can say is that the invective was violent and the sense of the words far from complimentary. Finally I saw, emerging from some undergrowth about four paces off, a grey helmet followed by a head and a body of a darker colour which I took to be that of an artillery captain coming out from behind a piece of camouflage. He told me, with considerable violence, to go away.

How was I to know that military routine differed to such an extent on the two sides of the road, and that here not only guns but officers were concealed with the maximum of care? . . . It was all very different from the charming Staff which I had left but a few minutes earlier.

"I'm taking despatches to the Head-Quarters of . . ."

"The Hell you are! Don't stay there. Besides, you can't get through. The place is untenable!"

"My orders are to go to Fresnoy. . . ."

"Fresnoy! You're mad! I've just told you you'll never make it. They've got the range of us to a T. The English are stark staring mad with their guns in the open like that on the slope of a hill!"

I retired in good order and a little further on made my way round the little wood which I had barely touched, and which I supposed to be a nest of guns.

Nevertheless, I had made up my mind to carry out my orders no matter how angry I might make this gunner who had got "the wind up". A moment's thought assured me that the Germans were not likely to mistake Ponton and me for an army, and that they

certainly would not alter the line of their fire just to catch two lonely horsemen. But I felt very lonely, and the occasional shells bursting in my neighbourhood did nothing to cheer me on my way.

At last I caught sight of a battery of 75's drawn up, without other concealment, in a valley on the far side of a hill. I managed to get news of the Nth Infantry Division, and to find out which way I must go in order to reach it. I continued my ride and ultimately fell in with a few soldiers dotted about among some ruins. By this time I was not far from my goal.

"Nth Divisional H-Q?"

"Here it is. Just go down there."

Once again—presumably it was always like this—I found myself going down a flight of steps leading into a cellar where a few candles very partially illuminated a scene almost identical with the one I had come upon a short while before.

The General commanding the Division was there. I made my report and he invited me to rest a bit. I asked why they were all living in dark, damp holes while a short distance away we were enjoying the far healthier conditions in the open air.

I was offered a bit of lunch, and took the opportunity of expressing surprise at my reception by the troglodyte (meaning the artillery officer) who had given me such an unfriendly welcome.... The general opinion was that he had been peppered a bit and thought the German guns were making a dead set at him.

"We like to get as much cover as possible and to show ourselves as little as we can help. The English have a superiority in material, artillery, tanks and aeroplanes:—in men it is even more overwhelming. They don't bother to conceal their troops. But it is always

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worth remembering that so far as efficiency goes a single French battery can achieve the same results as three English, and that without wasting ammunition. We are not so rich in men, guns and munitions to be able to afford to risk them unnecessarily."

To any impartial spectator without technical knowledge of military matters, the methods employed in the two zones would have seemed a whole century apart.

My return to . . . England was conducted more peacefully than my outward journey had been, thanks to the care I took to avoid the cave of Polyphemus,—I beg his pardon—of the irascible gunner. It was with a feeling of real pleasure that I once again saw the well-ordered spectacle of guns superbly aligned, and found my . . . "five o'clock tea".

On the evening of the same day, having been sent off once more to establish liaison between the two armies, I witnessed from a distance two almost simultaneous attacks—one by British cavalry, the other by French infantry.

The English effort was a repetition of the famous Reichsoffen charge, though with happier results, and with a success that was more surprising in 1918 than it would have been in 1870. (True, the enemy, this time, was in retreat, which probably made all the difference.) The cavalry regiment to which I have already referred—the "Fort Garry Horse"—surrounded and penetrated a village at the gallop. The operation was carried out with such dash that they occupied the place and captured a whole German Divisional Staff! Was it Beaufort or Warvilliers? I can visualize the whole scene, but even with the aid of a map I cannot, at this distance of time, be sure of the name. Our Canadians suffered heavy losses, especially in horses—but what splendid results they achieved! It is by no

means certain, that even under conditions of modern warfare, cavalry, well led, well armed and well mounted, cannot perform wonders in hastening the demoralization of a routed enemy.

I have mentioned the Canadians' heavy losses, but they were nothing compared to those of the French in their attack on Arvillers. Like the other, it was crowned with success, but at what a cost! Certain it is that the number of dead was appalling. The operation was carried out by black troops. In places the ground was literally covered with corpses. I could not help remembering the remark made to me that morning when I was visiting the French Staff—"We are not so rich in munitions and in men to be able . . ."—and yet! . . .

It was my last piece of liaison work, for I had to tell the French Division that once our objectives had been reached, we were to be sent back to rest.

Billerey told me that General Harman, commanding the Third Cavalry Division, was sending in my name for a D.C.M. in recognition of the way in which I had carried out my duties. Not to be outdone, my own sympathetic senior proposed me for a *Croix de Guerre*. This I got shortly afterwards. The D.C.M., however, went astray.

A short period of movement succeeded while we handed over to the troops who were relieving us in the front line. On the very last day, dear General Harman—and I, too—very nearly fell a victim to his passion for cleanliness. He was standing in his bath tub when a German aeroplane flew very low just over our heads. It set fire to one of our "sausage balloons", but caused no other damage. The men in the balloon made a safe parachute descent.

On this day, the 11th August, we left the neigh-

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bourhood of the village of Quesnoy, and went back towards Amiens.

Our way led through a country of gentle valleys. The enormous quantity of dust raised, in this dry season, by so many thousands of horses, to say nothing of the lorries, formed a mist which rose to a great height in the abnormally still air, and this gave to the landscape the appearance of a Japanese print.

When, at sunset, we debouched from the wood of Gentelles which dominates the valley of the Avre and the little village of Boves, and I saw the squadrons moving down the slopes on every side, aureoled in golden dust, I was impressed by the really magnificent sight, and reminded once again of Turner. When we arrived at Boves, however, the effect of all these faces white with dust and streaked with yellow powder was thoroughly comic. The men looked like a lot of clowns in uniform.

So exhausted were we, that during the night we spent in the wood of Boves, we all slept soundly in spite of the repeated visits of German aircraft.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE END OF A DREAM

W^E were sent back to do garrison work at Yzeux, a village standing on the right bank of the Somme, near Picquigny. From then on we could give ourselves peacefully to those many different sports which make up the life of the Englishman at war: tennis, badminton, quoits, racing, polo. As little shop was talked as possible. We scarcely even referred to the daily—or rather nightly—visit of German aircraft, which luckily did very little damage.

Imposing “fields” assembled to take part in the various races—remarkable for numbers if not for the quality of the entrants. The horses were of completely different “classes”, but this mattered little, since there were many races within each race. First place would be hotly disputed by a group of five or six serious runners who had outdistanced the rest of the field by twenty or thirty heads, while a second group, consisting of seven or eight horses ridden by officers who had laid bets among themselves, fought as hard for victory as the leaders. Sometimes a third group,

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even slower than the second, would provide a still further contest.

When any French cavalry happened to be in the neighbourhood, they were invited to take part, and our Anglo-Arabs often beat the field.

Suddenly I received an order to proceed at once to the "Second Army School" at Wisques, near St. Omer. Relegated to that back area I had to give up all hope of carrying out heroic liaison duties in the course of the coming offensives. I had finished with my days of glory. But that so utterly civilian a person as myself should be sent to an Army School, was the final stroke of irony in my extremely imperfect military career. What kind of instruction I was to give will appear in the sequel.

The Second British Army was commanded by General Plumer. Its school was situated in what had once been a Benedictine monastery. It was an ugly building, but very beautifully situated on a hill, flanked by a little wood, and with wide views over the plain. A regular little township of huts had sprung up all around. These contained the various messes, as well as a number of rooms for officers. The rest, and the Staff and Instructors' messes, were accommodated in houses in the immediate neighbourhood of the monastery.

I took up my new duties without enthusiasm. There was at Wisques one school for officers, another for N.C.O.'s, and a sort of skeleton battalion on which these aspirants could try their hands. I rather think that this battalion, well drilled as it was in the secrets of the parade ground, with officers all drawn from the "Guards", did a good deal to teach those who were put in temporary charge of it. It executed to perfection that splendid sequence of quite useless movements

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known as "Guards drill"—an impressive series of evolutions having nothing whatever to do with modern warfare, though spectacularly they are extremely effective. I believe that in London this effect is the sole aim and object of the different regiments of the Royal Guard. It impresses civilians—especially women—and is particularly valuable as marking a loyalty to certain very ancient and very honourable traditions. We at Wisques, unfortunately, had none of those impressive uniforms which do so much to heighten the effect.

Once, when a "show" was staged at the School, parade drill formed an important item on the programme. It was carried out by some eight or ten (perhaps more, I have forgotten) men carefully chosen for similarity of height and figure, all dressed in close-fitting black jerseys. They went through the usual movements, first at the ordinary pace and then in quick time. They were accompanied, and given the beat, by the band, which played simple and very clearly stressed tunes of the kind that is popular at children's gymnastic displays. The result was rather like a dance performed by a *corps de ballet* trained to a high degree of control and precision.

But to return to my first appearance at "Second Army School". I was introduced to Colonel Hamilton, the Commandant. His first remarks (never forget that we were "in England") concerned the Mess of which I was to be a member. He stressed the fact that it was an officers' Mess and that its members were expected to present a smart appearance, remarking that the last interpreter had, on one occasion, turned up at breakfast unshaven. This had caused grave scandal. To be on the safe side (after all, one never knows with Frenchmen: for nearly fifty years they have been

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governed by such an odd sort of creatures that one is never sure whether they ought to be shown into the drawing-room or the kitchen)—to be on the safe side, I repeat, I had been allotted a Mess of “learner-officers”—subalterns, lieutenants and captains. It was only later, when it became known that I was in the habit of shaving regularly and changing for dinner, that I was admitted to the Instructors’ Mess.

The first of these two Messes—that consisting of the subalterns, etc.—was accommodated in a huge wooden hut with a tarred paper roof. My own room was in a similar kind of building.

The Mess hut was a good forty yards long, and was divided into two parts—an ante-room and a dining-room. My new companions were drawn from every corner of the immense British Empire. As well as men from England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland, there were Canadians, Australians, South Africans and New Zealanders . . . and even so I have probably left out quite a number of Dominions and Colonies.

The course laid down for all officers—most of them young—was very varied, and embraced every branch of the military art, including—as in the days of the light-footed Achilles—running, wrestling, boxing, and many other activities. I gathered that the chief emphasis in this “advanced training” was laid on the learning of the famous “Guards Drill”, that decorative skill in concerted movement.

The Staff—or “État-Major de la place”, as it would have been called in France—lived in a charming little eighteenth century “manoir”, standing about five hundred yards from the Abbey.

I am no judge of the purely *military* value of the instruction received by the pupils at the Second Army School, but what I should like to emphasize, what

interested me particularly, was that *civilian* education was by no means neglected at Wisques.

It is a matter of general knowledge that commissions were given to a number of quite humble subalterns, men who, in peace time, would never have risen above the rank of "non-com"—what we now call *under-* and used to call *lower-officers*. As in France their commissions were for the period of the war only; they were "temporary officers", but, by a somewhat cruel irony, they were often referred to as "temporary . . . gentlemen"! Now one can offer no worse insult to an Englishman than to refuse to regard him as a gentleman; but the qualities that go to make up a gentleman are not learned in a day. That is why, in the hope of making the temporary into the permanent gentleman, these apprentices were instructed in the elements of good education, good appearance, and good manners. The idea, in fact, was not only to bring them up a step in rank, but to "bring them up" in a far wider sense.

With this end in view, a number of short manuals, dealing in rather puerile fashion with the subjects of good conduct and good behaviour, were scattered about the tables. These took the form of printed cards from which one could learn, among other things, how to sit at table, how to manage one's food, when and when not it was permissible to smoke, etc., etc. Some may regard this as a lot of nonsense; to me, I confess, it was rather touching. Personally speaking, I prefer any attempt to turn humble proletarians into men of breeding to our French habit of converting the well-educated into boors.

We were served at meal-time by "maidens in uniform". They looked after everything, except the cleaning of the rooms, and belonged to the WAACS

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(initials, followed by an S to indicate the plural, of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps). They wore, as I have already said, a regular uniform, consisting of khaki tunic and skirt, and a hat of the same colour turned up on one side. They were commanded at Wisques by two women, one with the rank of Captain, known popularly as "the queen bee", the other a comparatively humble Lieutenant. They wore exactly the same uniform as officers of the male sex, except that the upper part of the thigh was covered modestly by a short skirt.

These Waacs lived in barracks and had to submit to military discipline. They were allowed to go walking with Corporals and Privates, and these outings—remember, we are in England—were as innocent as though both the parties had been men, though they always paired off by two's. There *were* occasions, let me say, when the figures of some of the ladies showed a tendency to increase in size. . . .

"What do you do when that happens?" I once asked the "queen bee".

"I tell her she is a silly girl and send her to hospital in England."

There was, in our neighbourhood, another collection of amazons. These, nurses, and, for all I know, doctors, too, wore a uniform (hard though you may find it to believe) like that of naval officers, but with a short skirt. Most of these were young, and a few were quite pretty. The Waacs, on the other hand, were all physically unattractive.

The Second Army School was not rich in modern comforts. The day on which I arrived I asked about baths. I was shown a vaulted room on the ground floor of the monastery, in which stood a row of half-barrels serving the purpose of "tubs". At certain fixed

times, morning and evening, officers of every age and, let me add, of every degree of hairiness, took their baths in common. I very soon went back to the rubber bath which I had used all through the campaign, and enjoyed it in the privacy of my "room".

Each course lasted a month, irrespective of the rank of the student. At the end of that time there were examinations. When these were over a banquet was held in the former chapel preparatory to breaking up.

After this meal the company proceeded to play cards, to talk, to listen to music, and . . . to dance. Don't misunderstand me—we danced, but our partners were men. Unfortunately, neither the pretty nurses in their naval uniforms, nor the "*queen bee*" and her acolyte, were admitted. The dances were of the most rowdy sort, and I can still see the tall, thin Colonel commanding the school, engaging in a wild "two-step" with the tiny, paunchy, red-faced Wesleyan "padre", the latter all smiles and confusion.

So far I have spoken only of the end of term festivities, but I must not forget the examinations. Naturally I was not present at these, either in their written or oral stages, but there was nothing to prevent my witnessing the field-days which were held sometimes on a grand, sometimes on a smaller, scale. They seemed to be about as far removed from reality as the peace-time manœuvres which I had formerly attended in France.

The physical drill tests formed a regular show usually attended by the full muster of the school. The most popular items were the wrestling and boxing matches.

Wrestling, as understood in the English Army, consisted of short bouts lasting at most two or three minutes. The loser was he who touched the ground

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first with any part of himself other than his feet—whether it were with his knee or his hand. It was a test of quickness, suppleness and skill, in which mere strength and weight were of secondary importance.

Boxing was a very much sterner ordeal for the young officers. It was carried out, I believe, with eight-ounce gloves, and each match consisted of three rounds. Since the combatants were often of very different weight and strength, there was a good deal of hard "punishment". Make-believe, on such occasions, was never tolerated for a moment. This was proved to me by a very characteristic scene at which I was, on one occasion, present. It is hardly necessary to explain that most of those taking part in these boxing matches were poor performers, and that the fights were remarkable more for "go" than skill. As a lover of the art I was more often impressed by the fighting spirit displayed than by the technique of the fighters. One day, however, I noticed with pleasure at the very beginning of a bout, that the two adversaries were genuine boxers, and not, like most of their companions, merely tough beginners. They were well matched in weight, and had a considerable amount of skill.

The first round (the rounds were very short; two minutes, I think) had consisted of a lot of correct, quick sparring. The second round had lasted only half a minute when it was stopped by a sharp call of "break" from a colonel who had come especially from an outside formation to judge these contests. Had there been a foul? No, for in a very imperative tone he said: "You are not here to give a show, you are here to fight."

As a result of this interruption, the match became a genuine combat instead of a simple demonstration.

But I remembered the colonel's remark as indicative of the spirit which obtained in these tests of endurance.

I believe there is nothing similar in the corresponding training of our own young officers.

During my stay at "Second Army School" I had occasion to make the acquaintance of a small, smiling man, whom at first I had difficulty in "placing", but who turned out to be the "padre" of the Baptist Church. Whether there were many Baptists at the school I do not know. That was of minor importance to the ministers of the various religious persuasions of the United Kingdom. What mattered to them was publicity value, and to obtain it they would employ methods that were sometimes quite childish.

The modest, timid, little "padre" was much looked down upon by the High Church "padre", who regarded him as an inferior being, and more or less suspect of revolutionary leanings. I soon realized that this was doing him a grave injustice, though he liked to call himself a socialist. There was a certain amount of real religion in the man, and a great deal of real Christianity—by which I mean a spirit of charity, a desire to make himself useful, and a genuine wish to serve and help his fellow-men. He was quite devoid of malice and had an evangelic sweetness of temperament which showed itself in a very special way. Animated by a sincere desire to do good, he achieved, I believe, considerable success.

His method of working was to lend books, mostly of the "goody goody" kind, but chiefly to sell groceries and drinks—non-alcoholic, I need hardly say. For if the officers of His Gracious Majesty were free to gorge themselves "*ad lib*" on whisky, port, and other strong drinks, the non-coms and privates were forbidden such indulgence on pain of court-martial. Differentiation

carried to this extreme would, in France, shock even those who pride themselves on holding the most extreme aristocratic views. It is but one more proof, among the thousands that exist, of the impossibility of translating English ideas into their French equivalents. No one, I think, will deny that those four words "the great English democracy" have been dinned *ad nauseam* into the ears of the continental masses. But tell one of our demagogues—"an English officer has a right to all the alcoholic liquor he likes, and can drink himself unconscious with full permission of the authorities, while the non-com and the private may indulge only in non-intoxicating beverages, under pain of court-martial"—and he just wouldn't believe you. The *fact*, however, is beyond dispute.

In the French army, where, in spite of our democracy, the old traditions are still observed, drunkenness among privates or non-commissioned officers is a pardonable offence, among officers, never.

It is a tradition of the *Ancien Régime* that when the *men* have to make do with bad food the officers should share it with them. No French officer would hesitate for a moment to repeat the gesture of Henry IV after the battle of Coutras. His army, you will remember, was exhausted and tortured with thirst. A goblet was brought to the King, who was a great drinker. But at the moment of raising it to his lips he saw the eyes of his thirsty troops fixed on him, and immediately emptied its contents on the ground.

When an English officer is out walking he barely responds to regulation salutes always given him by the men he meets. When several officers are together, one of them only is deputed to "take the salute"—the others pay no attention. At first I was deeply shocked by this, but gradually I grew accustomed to the system.

It is certainly very practical, and, apparently, denotes no lack of consideration. In France, we always remember Louis XIV, who would salute even the maids of the Palace.

But to return to the decent little "padre". He ran a shop known as the Y.M.C.A. (Young Men's Christian Association), which dealt in food of every sort. In addition, it sold stationery and, as I have already mentioned, rather harmless reading matter. He also organized cinematograph entertainments. Moved by a spirit of charity, he was always trying to console the afflicted and to bring back into the right way those who had wandered from it. Evil, for him, was confined to swearing and *excessive* drinking, for the "Tommy", in the privacy of his billets could always find ways and means of circumventing the military regulations on this point. His advice had the authority of an *order*, for he held the rank of Captain, and was responsible for discipline at, for instance, his cinematograph entertainments. One day the School Commandant, wishing to tighten up discipline, said to him, in more or less these words: "There are a lot of dam' tough men in this lot: you must give them hell!" As advice to a chaplain the phrasing was, to say the least, unusual. I still laugh when I think of it.

He knew nothing whatever of the "sins of the flesh". It was on me, more often than not, that the sad duty fell of enjoining silence on the poor girls who had been tempted into transgression by the promise of marriage—a frequent occurrence where non-coms and privates were concerned.

The little "padre" prided himself on holding advanced views, but that did not prevent his judging very harshly the conduct of the English working-man, or showing the greatest possible respect for tradition

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and the established hierarchy. For him, Socialism meant love of the underdog—what we, in France, should call Christian charity.

I have never, least of all while I was a member of the British army, concealed my monarchist and aristocratic sympathies, or my loathing for the actual system of government obtaining in my country, a system which is never fully appreciated by our English friends if only because it has enabled them to keep us in a form of vassalage. Whenever I have had to deal with "gentlemen" I have always hastened to clarify their minds on this point.

It was at Wisques that a very senior Staff Officer once said to me:

"Funnily enough, France is a Republic, but every decent Frenchman you meet is a monarchist!"

One day, at table, the conversation turned on the French Revolution, and various officers began trotting out all the usual commonplaces, the kind of thing one finds in Carlyle and in Charles Dickens's "*Tale of Two Cities*". One of the speakers began to enlarge on the advantages which the Revolution had brought to France. Seeing the expression of irony with which I was listening, he turned to me and said:

"Naturally, Vernon won't admit that the French Revolution had any good results."

Complete silence followed this sally. I broke it by saying quite simply and very loud:

"You're wrong, there is one."

Exclamations of astonishment greeted this statement, followed by a volley of questions. What could it be that I was willing to regard as a benefit?

"The sole advantage of the French Revolution is the one you are all too stupid to understand... the *metric system*."

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There was a burst of applause, and the laughter was all on my side. Another point: the English, being as *sensitive* as they are *polite*, knew that I had no particular liking for the tune to which so many of my ancestors had been beheaded, and always avoided having the *Marseillaise* played in my presence.

In addition to the training given by specialist instructors, a number of speakers and lecturers—I had almost said missionaries—used to address the students of the Second Army School. One day we had a visit from a regular celebrity, a man who, I was told, was the best lecturer in the whole of the British Army, and sowed the good seed everywhere he went with such success that he had become a sort of institution, and did nothing else. He was a naval officer, and I could not help wondering why a sailor should be asked to address a school which was concerned only with warfare on land—and beneath it. But the lecturer turned out to be a naval officer only in the sense that the explorer Stanley was a journalist. His specialty was voyages of exploration and big game hunting.

Just as a great many talkers from across the Channel have their “best joke”, so he had his “best lecture”, and it was that we were to hear. Everyone was in high spirits and regarded the whole business as a holiday. To stay away would have been regarded as silly. Consequently, I made a point of attending, and was given a seat in the front row.

A blackboard had been erected behind the lecturer, and on this he had drawn a huge map of Central and Southern Africa, where the incidents about which he was to talk had taken place. To help us in following his various wanderings on this map, he made use of a large stick which he never let out of his grasp. It was an integral part of the lecture. . . .

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This, the lecture, was a picturesque narrative, rich in details which had little or nothing to do with matters military, of an expedition which might well have had exploration or hunting as its object, if he had not been careful to explain to us that its purpose was the transport from, I think, Port Natal of a gun-boat in sections, to be assembled on the banks of Lake Tanganyika and launched upon that vast expanse of water where the Admiralty had no fighting vessels at all, while the Germans rejoiced in the possession of a strong fleet consisting of a ship of about fifty tons displacement.

He told us all the usual things about his battle with deadly flies, snakes, wild animals, pachydermatous monsters, and, above all, the trackless equatorial forest.

"This", said the lecturer, brandishing his heavy bamboo stick, "is one of the products of the African forest, the dangers of which we succeeded in overcoming."

(Prolonged applause.)

By this time we were approaching Lake Tanganyika but not the end of the expedition by any means. Before challenging the enemy fleet (consisting of a single flag-ship) it had been necessary to wage war against the local defenders, those, in particular, who, well armed and excellently protected, occupied the marshy banks of the lake—I mean the hippopotamuses. These, furious at the invasion of their domain by strangers, had put up a terrible "common front". The obstinate pioneers of British race had, however, won the day after an epic struggle. The largest of the monsters had been slain and the others had taken to flight.

"And this", said the lecturer, displaying the handle

of his famous stick, "is one of the very teeth of this hippopotamus".

There was a thunder of applause. My object in making these quotations is to recreate the atmosphere of this *military* dissertation. . . .

The part of the narrative which concerned the actual war came at the end. It was no less entertaining than the rest—at least to me. The most exciting adventures to be found in Jules Verne were as nothing compared to the speaker's fantastic recital, which would not have been out of place in *The Young Captain* or *The Mysterious Island*.

What patience, what skill, what prudence, what energy, the heroic little group of Englishmen had had to display in order to transport and assemble the sections of their ship, install the engines, despite unheard of difficulties, mount the propeller, and finally to launch the vessel, almost under the eyes of the German fleet (a gun-boat, you will remember) on the waters of that African lake, six hundred and fifty kilometres long by no less than fifty wide, the banks of which were made impassable by a riot of gigantic vegetation. As in all children's books, the greater the difficulties, the more successfully were they surmounted.

The German was bigger, heavier, better armed, but he had to deal with Englishmen . . . and on the water, their own element. To think that anything afloat could challenge the English was sheer insolence . . . to dream of dominating a lake little short of blasphemy!

The very superiority in armament of the big German turned out to be his undoing, for his weight made him slower than his English adversary. Besides, his guns were so placed that he had to bring his broadside to bear in order to get them into action, and thus to

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expose his flank, while the English vessel could fire forward. Each commander wished to take full advantage of his craft, with the result that the battle became one of movement in which, naturally, the English, being better sailors, had the upper hand. They succeeded, eventually, in sinking their opponent—after which the British flag flew in undisputed mastery over the whole expanse of the reconquered African lake.

The English never grow up. They are much to be envied, for eternal youth was the quality attributed by the Ancient Greeks to their gods. To this, and not (*pace* Colonel Bramble) to their stupidity, is due the long tenure of world-power which they have enjoyed. Eternal children that they are, they never become absorbed in serious questions, but attend to them only when they cannot avoid doing so. Their government, their Admiralty, their "Intelligence" service, sees, as a rule, only a few inches in front of its nose. Problems are boring to the very young. The superiority of the Anglo-Saxons lies in their inability to grow up. Therein resides the secret of happiness. The English are a happy people, with a history of which they can be proud.

They are little children who seek not the Kingdom of God, but the Kingdom of this world—and they have gained it. This precious gift of youth enables them to take an unceasing interest in the trivialities of life and to ignore the major problems which are so disagreeable and so depressing. Is it a racial inheritance? Is it the result of their education?—a bit of both, almost certainly. But above all it is the product of the general will—of what one is tempted to call the general *good* will.

When every man jack of an army engaged in a long

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and arduous campaign thinks of nothing, really, but tea, hot toast, the next game of tennis or polo, the coming of the May-fly, what an enormous advantage it enjoys over us French, who are for ever "talking shop" and discussing the war, except when we take a few moments off for the purpose of arguing on general ideas, the future of mankind or the destinies of Europe and civilization!

Professional philosophers will argue for ever whether it is better, like the English, to act as though they had "no brains at all", or, like the French, to talk and talk until "reason is lost in reasoning".

Never to speak, or to speak as little as possible, about tedious matters, even in the course of a campaign, is a sign of good taste. It is also a sign of modesty, and, particularly, of wisdom.

One of my last memories of the Second Army School concerns the visit paid to it by General Plumer, who, at that time, was the Army Commander. It took place, if my memory serves, at the end of September or the beginning of October, 1918. The successes of the allied troops had been very considerable, but no one was as yet in a position to say whether they would prove decisive. It was thought that the war might still go on for an indefinite period. I was particularly glad of the opportunity to hear an Army Commander addressing a body of specially chosen officers, all of whom had had experience of active service and were now being trained to a high pitch of efficiency by an elaborately organized Course of Instruction. He was to explain, in my presence, what it was that their King and Country expected of them.

General Plumer was a sturdy man of medium height. His face, with its clipped white moustache, was full of energy and determination. The whole man radiated

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an impression of strength. With a firm, rather heavy, tread, he advanced to the edge of the platform.

"Gentlemen", he said in a loud voice and enunciating his words very clearly, "all I want to do to-day is to remind you of the three essential qualities that go to make up a good soldier. The . . . first . . . is . . . SMART-NESS" (the word was carefully stressed).

Here I must digress for a moment, since this term, for all its imprecision, has for English ears a perfectly precise connotation, and is quite untranslatable. It is as impossible to render into French as is the Italian word "*virtù*". Sublime looseness of the English tongue. *Smartness!* Does it mean elegance, *chic*, activity, vigour? . . . It is all these things and something more. While I sought in my mind for an equivalent term in my own language, I was pretty clear as to what it meant. Meanwhile, the General was developing his theme.

A smart officer is always a good officer; a smart regiment is always a good regiment; a smart army is always a good army. . . ."

And General Plumer was perfectly right. One of the worst errors committed by modern military regulations is the way in which they have destroyed that martial elegance which our soldiers could still boast in 1870. One sees too many, far too many, of our splendid men looking dirty and badly turned out. The only time I was punished during my years of service in the French army was when I tried to dress well. My gloves roused the jealousy of an irascible non-commissioned officer. . . .

Only the Chasseurs-à-pied, the Alpins, and a few regiments of cavalry, have retained a little (but how little) of that "flourish" which was typical of France in the old days when war was still waged "in lace and

ruffles". The general lowering of dress standards is due to the fact that the revolutionary writers waxed enthusiastic over the "volunteers in wooden shoes". Serious historians have been compelled to recognize that, in fact, these volunteers were a considerable embarrassment to the armies in the field, and that the generals of the Republic owed their success to the excellent military organization of the *Ancien Régime*. The famous wooden shoes, just like the plumes and lace of the "People's Representatives" who accompanied the troops, were part of the same fantastic piece of stage-management intended to impress the minds of simple and ignorant folk.

Our soldiers of to-day are first-rate. They would be no less so if their uniforms were practical and well-cut. Flambeau, the grenadier of Edmond Rostand's play, is still with us. His bearskin, his white leather belts, his air of heroism—all these were luxuries, but they were useful luxuries.

Smartness is a luxury. The wearing of impeccable kilts by the magnificent Scottish regiments, is all a part of smartness; so was the way in which the Light Brigade charged the Russian batteries at Balaclava. And General Plumer was right when he described the heroic intrepidity of the English troops as a form of elegance.

The other two essential qualities mentioned by the Commander of the Second Army were, if I am not wrong, "discipline" and "efficiency". Since both of these are the commonplaces of all armies, I do not recollect his exact words. It was the beginning of his speech which most struck me and which I shall never forget.

Time passed. The successes of the allied arms grew more marked. Nevertheless, the work at Wisques went on. My duty was to teach French to

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the various ranks represented at the school. I had one class for officers, another for N.C.O.'s, yet another for "Waacs". These ladies were certainly a good deal keener than my other pupils. Whether I should have obtained satisfactory results if my lessons had continued I do not know. They were interrupted by the Armistice.

The great day was marked by the letting off of a lot of rockets. But everyone was busy thinking of his future. There was a good deal of nervousness about the seeds of revolution which had been sown by the war. Many regretted now all the talk there had been about liberty and democracy. The ill-fated Wilson reminded us that the world must be "made safe for democracy",¹ an ideal that did not chime very happily with the hierarchic traditions of Great Britain. There had been so much said about "irresponsible autocrats" that men were only too ready to use the same words when describing their "bosses", whether on farms or in factories and offices.

Colonel Hamilton assembled the School and announced the news of the Armistice and of the peace which would probably follow in its wake. He advised everybody to get back to work, and to see to it that they were properly paid. He issued a general warning against Lloyd George and his rancorous attack on the Dukes.

"It happens that my grandfather was a Duke, and I never heard of any estate where the men were better paid and the farmers more happy. . . ."

¹ I am not alone in thinking that this term "ill-fated" is justly used in this connexion. (See the *National Review*, Oct. 1938, p. 469, where the following words appear—"a missionary of discord from the other side of the Atlantic." See, too, two articles by General Weygand in the *Revue de Paris*, 1st and 15th November, 1938.)

Those may not have been his exact words, but they were something like it. I knew that he was referring to the Duke of Abercorn, whose tenants, I had every reason to suppose, were perfectly contented.

The advice was excellent, but I had a feeling that most of the men he was addressing had got accustomed to war conditions and would find it hard to get back to reality.

Shortly afterwards an order came from G.H.Q. that the end of hostilities should be celebrated by a religious service. The only official chaplain was the representative of the Established Church. He alone was qualified to conduct a ceremony which was bound to be attended by men of many different denominations. He did it with great dignity and perfect tact. Officers, N.C.O.'s and men were drawn up on an open space at the far end of which a sort of platform had been erected against the wall of the monastery chapel. On this the chaplain took his place in soutane and surplice, looking much like a Catholic priest. Let it not be forgotten that he was about to speak to men drawn from every quarter of the globe and belonging to every one of its religious persuasions.

"We are here", he began, "to give thanks to God in that he has seen fit to let us witness the end of this terrible war. On me falls the duty of presiding over the religious service which is to celebrate so wonderful an event. I shall do so in a way that need shock nobody, whatever his beliefs. All I ask is that you should join with me in singing something that you all know—a hymn in fact: God Save the King. But to mark the *fact* that this hymn is actually a prayer, I would ask you to end it with the word Amen. After that, I shall ask on you all a blessing from God."

This very lovely hymn was sung in a dignified and

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moving manner, and when it was done the Chaplain blessed the assembled troops in the words ordained by the Anglican liturgy, which are the same as those of the Catholic Church.

Soon after this beautiful and simple ceremony I received my demobilization papers. The Colonel Commanding the School was unfortunately on leave at the time. Nevertheless, at dinner on the day before my departure my health was most generously drunk, and one of the Captains in a friendly, a happily phrased, and much too kind, speech, expressed the pleasure which he and his comrades had felt in having had as their comrade through so many months a "gentleman of France".

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

TWENTY YEARS AFTER

TWENTY years!—yes, indeed, twenty years! a long stretch, and one which has seen a good many modifications in the appearance of what Shakespeare calls “this whory world”. The term is not inept as a description of the changes that have taken place in the manners of this planet during the last twenty years.

Time flies. It is never “the present”, and yet the future comes upon us with the same violent swiftness as the perspective of a road which a powerful car is eating up to the tune of a hundred miles an hour. With each minute that flits by the past grows longer, and the future of yesterday becomes to-morrow’s past.

But memory at least has life and reality, and to-day, in 1938, these middle-aged gentlemen I meet are still to me the young officers I knew in 1917. Even the dead are there—present on parade.

All this, no doubt, would have seemed a little different had I been often to England since the war, had I seen the process of ageing in those old friends of mine—

had they grown old along with me. But we French have had so much—more than our English friends have ever quite realized—to build up again in the spiritual as well as the material circumstances of our “homes”. If our children have grown up, so, too, has the franc in relation to the pound sterling, and that has made even the briefest visit to England a matter of difficulty for my countrymen.

Still, I have managed to stay there on two occasions since the war. I expected to find “John Bull’s *own* Island” terribly altered—for the worse, I mean. I was afraid that I should see everything Americanized, standardized—to use those horribly expressive expressions—that I should no longer feel the atmosphere as sympathetic as I had done in the early years of the century.

A foreigner can never judge. He can only ask questions and record impressions. That is what I shall attempt to do here.

Certainly there have been many modifications in the life of the English, but they are such as all living organisms must needs experience, and I can say with pleasure that the country I have rediscovered is a progressive land in which tradition has not stood in the way of improvement, or evolution shown itself the enemy of continuity.

England is still a country of good breeding, a country where, as a French friend of mine once said (with pardonable exaggeration) there are no “common” people, no matter what their class.

The foreigner landing at Dover or at Folkestone, finds the same cheerful good companionship, the same pleasing simplicity. The Customs Officials are still sincerely surprised to find that a French woman needs eight hats for a stay of ten days, and are with diffi-

culty persuaded that she is not going to sell some of them.

London is, as it ever was, a city where people are always in a hurry and always neat, where the policemen are never rattled and can be relied upon to give accurate information, where the traffic is terrifying but well controlled, where one can still find green and peaceful corners full of an inimitable charm, reminders of the past set among old buildings and fine trees. Its colour is, in summer, always exquisite: all grey and black, relieved by the bright greenery of gardens and the scarlet splashes of moving omnibuses.

I know no city in the world where I would rather settle, where I could find such a combination of comfort and the picturesque, as in the gardens and the old houses of the Temple or Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Many authors have written of London. I have not the eloquence necessary to follow in their footsteps. But I know that I should like nothing so much as to be able to go back there, live there, and then, having become one of the "happy few" who know from experience what the "Charm of London" really is, to describe it for the benefit of those "unhappy many" Frenchmen for whom it has remained an unknown quantity.

As to the English countryside, I have always found it unique. What has most changed—for the worst—the pleasant landscapes of my own country, has been the growing habit of setting up wire fences. It cannot be due to any memory of captivity—for I was never made prisoner during the war—but whatever the reason, I know that I call down the curses of the infernal gods upon the hateful barbed wire which has ended by transforming our woods, our heaths, our grass-land and our fields, into a series of patches

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armed against the encroaching stranger with sharp steel points. The beneficent effects of fox hunting have done much to preserve the English country from this abomination.

Many will argue that this preservation of wild nature and of the picturesque is wholly artificial. Maybe, but the results are happy. I know, too, that the impression of continuity is largely "bogus" (so much the worse), that it is often only a mask which gives to things essentially different an appearance of being what once they were. I am not ignorant that many institutions are, by this time, little more than names which disguise an inner emptiness. It may be all to the good that ancient "Keeps" are now nothing but wine-cellars, but it is, perhaps, regrettable that many an old barn has been turned into a covered Badminton court. . . . Still, the fact that keep and barn are still there shows that men have resisted that stupid hatred of the past which leads them sometimes to destroy things which may still have a use, and which do, at least, enshrine in their names a little part of history.

An old name is always worthy of veneration, and England is the country where respect is accorded even to the shadow of what deserves it. The same was true of Ancient Rome. The influence of Rome persisted, and its persistence was due to the magnificent orderliness which the Romans imposed upon their world, and, especially, to the continuity which gave it its power.

All that I have said, and all that I still have to say, are the conclusions of a perfectly independent judgment. I am trying here to set down what has been seen in England and what has been thought of the English by a Frenchman, who, having often visited

but never lived in the country, has never become the victim of those prejudices inseparable from prolonged residence and from the assumption of habits unmodified by the exercise of the critical spirit. Being neither a writer nor a journalist by profession, I belong to no school or group, and am consequently free to say what I think.

One preliminary generalization I must make before going on to the final section of this book—which will take the form of a number of conclusions. The Englishman at home is a totally different person from the Englishman abroad. He is still more different if one considers him as an individual, and not as a representative of his nation.

That said, I shall now set myself to explain how it is that contemporary England, having been one of the *successes* of human history, remains one of its *miracles*. I shall end on a note of interrogation. Can this miracle last? The answer to this question only the future can give. For two reasons it is vital to the peace and happiness of our planet: first, because the powerful English fleet is the sole guarantee against a recrudescence of piracy on all the seas of the world: second, because a conservative England is the one strong bulwark against the complete overrunning of the world by a universal Bolshevism, which would mean the end of civilization.

No one, therefore, can be indifferent to the solidity of that monument which goes by the name of the British Empire. But it has formidable enemies, both within it and without. I hope that it may be permitted to a Frenchman who loves the English to tell them when he thinks they are wrong about the dangers which threaten them.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE ENGLISH AT HOME: PUBLIC LIFE

THE use of a word to connote its opposite is a very ancient linguistic habit of mankind. Thus, the Greeks called the Furies Eumenides (the Well-Intentioned). By an analogous system, statesmen the world over, not excluding the English themselves, insist on using the word "democracy" to describe the form of government under which the latter live. It is, in fact, impossible to translate the word as it is used in England; at any rate, to find a French equivalent for it. The most one can say is that Great Britain is a democracy in the sense that the Athenian Republic was a democracy at the height of her power, when she was composed of about thirty thousand citizens living in the midst of a hundred and twenty thousand slaves and foreigners. The proportion between citizens enjoying full civic rights and those with practically none at all in the British Empire, is, if one calculates the total of its inhabitants, even more remarkable. To take India alone, including with the provinces directly administered by England the various tributary and protected states, and Burmah,

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we are faced with a census of something like three hundred and fifteen million souls. Not all of these, naturally, work for the benefit of the forty million inhabitants of the British Isles. Still, one must admit, that an enormous number of British subjects are not in enjoyment of full civic rights.

Any comparison with the French Republic of to-day is doubly ridiculous. In the first place, England is not governed by a body of deputies drawn from the body of the people, but by a King, an hereditary peerage, and a House of Commons, more than nine-tenths of whose members are supplied by the class which has been educated at the Public Schools. In the second place, the English proletariat itself forms a privileged aristocracy as compared with the innumerable "natives" of all colours who work for it, and as compared with the social status of the worker in most European countries.

If the English workman had to adopt the standard of living of his Spanish, Czechslovakian, and, more particularly, his Russian comrades, he would be amazed. I say nothing of China and Japan. The English "man of the people" too seldom realizes that he is living on the work of others. But he has a vote, and he is represented in the House of Commons. This House is far from being the principal organ of Government. Apart from the fact that it is itself composed, as I have already pointed out, almost entirely of individuals belonging to a certain class, and that the House of Lords and the Crown are both functions of the Constitutional machine, there are a number of autonomous organizations, enjoying complete freedom and great authority, which are dependent on no sort of election, and which wield a power which is no less vast for being often invisible.

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There is, for instance, the Bench. It is safe to say that the independence of the English Judges is the strongest of all the foundations of English liberty. Then there is the Admiralty and the "Intelligence Service", two benevolent and tutelary gods so solidly established that their position is unassailable. These gods have their temples, their mysteries, and their funds. . . . They make possible the smooth running of the rest of the complicated machinery of the state. They need, to be sure, the great body of the people which they serve only in the office of its arms: but the great body would be hopelessly lost without them.

It can hardly be necessary to remind the English of the importance of an independent Judicature. It might, however, be well for them to realize that they are almost the only people in Europe to live under its benefits. England is the *only* country whose inhabitants *believe* in justice and *respect* it, where a man can take it for granted that the Judges decide according to the dictates of their conscience. The King alone is superior to the Law, since it is a Constitutional axiom that "the King can do no wrong".

Not only are the Judges in England independent and free to decide according to their conscience, but the whole question of legal sanctions is more fairly envisaged than it is, for instance, in France. In England the accused is held to be innocent until he is proved guilty, while with us he is not only held to be guilty, but is treated as such, sometimes for weeks before he comes up for trial and during the whole time that the court is considering the evidence.

I do not mean to maintain that there is *no* justice elsewhere in the world. But this I do know, that almost everywhere else, in many cases, the Judges are

instructed by the Government in power, and are removed if they go contrary to its wishes. In England they are the representatives of Justice, in other countries of a political party.

Another point. In France especially, Justice is the victim of a sort of ideology which the English rightly mistrust. In their view the Judge's duty is the repression of crime, and it is expected that he will carry out that duty as quickly and as well as possible. His office is to maintain public order, and he succeeds in doing so. The Jury, certainly, is there in the interests of the accused, but it works hand in glove with the Judge for the preservation of order above all things.

More than in France, I believe, the Jury in England is prepared to follow the directions given it from the Bench.

If the Corporation of Lawyers is extremely powerful across the Channel, if it is a very costly luxury for the nation, it does ensure to the citizens of that nation advantages unknown in any other country of Europe, not the least of which is *quick* justice.

It should be added that English lawyers are drawn, like most public officials, from the social class which has been educated at the Public Schools. Their Corporation is, therefore, a direct product of the governing aristocracy. It even plays a part in the actual government of the country since, *qua* Corporation, it is represented in the House of Lords (1) by the Lord Chancellor, who not only sits there by virtue of his office, but receives an hereditary title (and a salary of £10,000, corresponding to 1,780,000 French francs, and a life-pension of £3000); (2) by a certain number of other lawyers, some with hereditary titles, others with titles lapsing at their death.

The Government properly speaking, that is to say, the Ministry, is supplied by the House of Commons, but it is only the *organ* of government. Linked with it, and in several respects superior to it, are the King and the House of Lords. The King is the bond that holds the Empire together: he is its expression. He is the topmost element in the hierarchy. Unlike the president of a republic he does not occupy his position as an elected official. Consequently he is not the mouthpiece of a Party but of the Nation. He reigns in the interests of all, instead of governing against the wishes of some. This is what chiefly differentiates him from a President, though the latter, as in the United States, for example, may have more real power than he has. Finally, he has continuity: for it is of the essence of the Monarchy never to lapse with death.

The House of Lords is theoretically entitled to oppose decisions taken by the House of Commons. It can always very markedly delay, and often considerably modify them. Its chief value, however, is as the summit and symbol of an heirarchy of titles, a large number of which are of long-established creation, while many are the rewards given to mark the achievements of men in a large number of activities. Their holders have certain privileges, mostly of an honourable rather than a profitable nature.

This hierarchy of titles is something very special to England. The holders of titles (so far as I can make out) do not, as does the French nobility, constitute a caste. It may be well to add here that in France nobility and titles are a survival without any official validity whatever. At the same time, it should be remembered that in France, and especially when nobility was still an officially recognized caste, its value, so to speak, had nothing, or very little, to do

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with the rank occupied *within* the nobility by any given individual. In aristocratic circles, for instance, a Vicomte de la Rochefoucauld would always be given precedence of a Duke of a later creation, while a young Duke of good family might often be passed over in favour of a commoner whose age entitled him to special consideration. Far more attention was, and is, paid in France to length of lineage and to distinction of family than to the relative seniority or juniority of actual "steps" in the Peerage. Besides, except in the case of Dukes, a large number of titles are, or were, "courtesy": that is to say, they gained validity only as and when their holders were presented to the King, and did not carry with them any particular prerogatives.

These three elements of the English State, the Crown, the Lords, and the Commons, form together an essentially aristocratic whole against the background of which there has emerged what may be called a national aristocracy.

The British Member of Parliament is usually regarded by foreigners as a "somebody". It will soon be impossible to say the same (if, indeed, it ever was possible) about his opposite number in France, Germany or Italy.

A State built on such hierarchic, such aristocratic principles must needs have a very strong patriotic sense. One result of this universal love of country is that all Public Servants in the United Kingdom, from the highest to the lowest, are honoured and respected. They are servants of the people, *not* the protégés of a Party.

It follows that England is, before all else, patriotic.

The national strain is held in honour, and an hereditary aristocracy is in constant process of formation.

THE ENGLISH AT HOME: PUBLIC LIFE

Wealth is respected, and *therefore* the principle of inheritance; or vice versa.

Intelligence is at a premium, since those in the Public Service are recruited from the educated class.

The family is encouraged, and the continuity of parental authority.

Public order is maintained, which is as much as to say that the egalitarian principle is not encouraged.

Religion and morality are protected, at least in theory.

Reverse, one might say, these seven propositions, and you get a true picture of *democratic* government.

Wealth plays a great part in English life. Almost all the Peers are extremely rich. Those who are promoted to the Peerage are, as a rule, rich already or receive substantial endowments. Sometimes a government will ask the King to create a "batch" of Peers in order that it may be ensured of a majority in the Upper House.

What, in the future—for in Britain one must always keep one's eyes on the future—will be the effect of all this infusion of new blood into an ancient hierarchy? I do not believe that any foreigner is in a position to prophesy. Renewed youth, it is true, is a guarantee of health and continuity. The principle of heredity, on the other hand, tends to create a state of mind which will almost certainly check those disadvantages which might result from too crude a modification of the spirit obtaining in one of the great departments of the State.

For the most part, the wealth of the Peerage is derived, at least *in its origins*, from land. Those whose estates have lent themselves to urban development are more fortunate than their fellows who have remained

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at the agricultural level. Since the bearers of illustrious names still own vast tracts of country, are still rich in real estate, the prestige of landed wealth is still high in a country in which industrial wealth appears to predominate, since it is still the most general form of national prosperity.

England being a commercial rather than a producing country, the merchant mentality tends to dominate its life. The prestige attaching to landed wealth is a counterpoise to this tendency. This fact is all the more valuable because landed property is essentially stable, while the wealth resulting from business enterprise is always fluctuating. This uncertainty, inseparable from commercial enterprise, is accentuated by the love of gambling which is to be found variously manifested in all Englishmen. Its most common form is speculation on the Stock Exchange, where it results in marked differences in fortune.

The love of risk, so typical of the English character, is to be found in every department of national life, and gives an appearance of "sport" to almost every activity. Most games and competitions of physical endurance now involve betting, and consequently have become financial transactions in which the element of risk is considerable. This fact has, undoubtedly, brought about a complete transformation in all fields of sport, and what began by being an excuse for betting now almost entirely lives from it! The use of "public money" alone makes possible the organization of matches and competitions. There is, of course, a reverse side to the medal. Sport has become a spectacle. It is "looked at" rather than indulged in—two very different things.

Still, the love of risk is a great quality in a nation. It is as necessary in commerce and industry as in Stock

Exchange speculation. No new model of an engine can be put on the market, no new branch of a business can be opened without risk. Risk is involved in the successful running of even the smallest commercial enterprise. It is always necessary to buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market. It is difficult to say at what point speculation, legitimately so called, begins, but it is safe to maintain that tens of millions of English people live on a process of universal speculation, the operations of which cover the whole habitable globe. Thus "playing the markets" and business initiative are indissolubly linked.

If commerce depends on the *quantity* of articles sold, agriculture, especially in England, depends on the *quality* of what is marketed. Here, too, the aristocratic slant of the national life is once more in evidence. All the breeds of English horses are excellent: English sheep are unequalled both for eating and shearing. It is in England that a race of cattle has been evolved, hornless, almost legless, and with tiny heads, cattle that are little more than cubes of meat. The same might be said of English pigs. All these animals are tended as though they were great lords, groomed, washed, combed. I can't help wondering why the expression "dirty as a pig" is still used in England, for I have seen English pigs so silky and so clean that they look, for all the world, like so many race-horses. Even English pigs react from democracy.

I have spoken elsewhere of the excellence of English dogs. New breeds are developed every ten years. The sale of "dogs de luxe" is an important department of English commercial life.

Some of my readers may think that I am joking when I insist so strongly on the universally aristocratic nature of the English. And yet, do they not possess

a species of game unlike anything else in the world, that game of all games, the grouse?

Is the aristocratic outlook a result of that system of education which has kept the great English lords on their estates? I am in no position to say. All I can assert is that the prestige still enjoyed by the English peerage is part and parcel of their territorial position, which, both morally and materially, gives to the nation a happy element of stability. I think that one might compare the advantages derived from these great landed fortunes—the possession of land is the one sign in England that a man has definitely *arrived*—with those resulting in France of the *Ancien Régime* from the admirable law of *derogation*. A nobleman was forbidden to indulge in commerce on pain of losing caste, that is to say, of forfeiting his right to call himself noble. The result of this was that any rich man who was promoted to the nobility had, *ipso facto*, to cease from all commercial activities. Since, in France, the nobility represented the highest social class to which a man might attain, it followed that its privileges were highly prized. Every man who had built up a handsome fortune sought a patent of nobility. But once attained, it put an end to any possibility of still further increasing a fortune which might otherwise have attained an impersonal and irresponsible magnitude. Once consolidated it ceased to grow, and could not, therefore, become a public danger since its extent was now known to all. Nobles, and the ennobled masters of vast fortunes, being no longer in a position to use them for business purposes, employed their money in those great schemes of magnificent building of which the great Comptrollers of the eighteenth century, Blossac at Poitiers and Tourny at Bordeaux, have left us examples.

English peers, as a result of the prestige attaching to them as members of the governing class, of the traditions of their caste, of their age-old reputation as hosts in the grand manner, have had on the "commoners" of England much the same influence as had the former great nobles of France on the plebeian merchant class. I know, of course, that in this country of aristocratic shopkeepers there is nothing to prevent a Duke selling coffee if he likes. Nevertheless, he is obliged, sometimes as a result of carefully drawn entails, to devote part at least of his income to the maintenance of his vast estates.

Certain social philosophers regard the division of land as an excellent thing. As a rule they have never lived in the country. They are completely ignorant of the fact that subdivision means wastage. The parcelling out of landed property in France as a result of succession laws has had at least two obvious consequences. It leads inevitably to complete deforestation, and—what is too frequently forgotten—it is one of the most active elements in the production of social jealousy, of democratic "*invidia*".

The English, who have been less exposed to this curse than we have, are careful to guard against it. They know, too, that a fine tree like a fine gentleman is something that God cannot make in a day (that may be why they are so anxious to enter the ranks of the peerage at the earliest possible moment).

It is not my intention to deliver a speech or write a manual on the harmful effects of deforestation. Those who knew the West of France fifty years ago will bear witness to the "monstrous shame" of that countryside as it is to-day. In England, the grocer, say, who has made money and bought himself a "bit of property", becomes at once infected by the aristocratic passion for

preservation. He feels for his trees as deep a love as could any landlord of an ancient line. The right of primogeniture is the salvation of those great estates, some of the benefits accruing from which I have already mentioned. There are many others: notably those derived by the tenants. But for the right of primogeniture there would be no firmly-based Nobility, no big properties, no agriculture on a large scale, and no fine timber. And what better check on certain kinds of foolishness could there be than the system of "entail"?

An English Lord of wide acres is, to be sure, proud of the beauty of his house and of the artistic treasures which it contains. But he is, perhaps, no less so of the old oaks with their rooks' nests, the fine cattle which he breeds, the fields which he tills. And all these things are a lasting benefit to the country.

What a joy it must be for the *parvenu* (and I use the word here not in its pejorative sense—just the contrary, in fact) to feel that he has at last become the real thing and is no longer merely an imitation. What pride he must take in entering at local Shows the fine farm animals raised on his estates, cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry, thorough-bred horses, to say nothing of horses and dogs intended for use in the chase.

This happy spirit of emulation raises the standard of all the elements of prosperity. The *parvenu* soon learns to eschew all merely ostentatious display, for his object is to attain to that simplicity which is the mark of the old-established magnate.

But before he can become the "genuine article" he must have his little mania, his harmless "hobby". This may take the form of planting trees or collecting fine editions. I once knew one of these recently established landowners whose particular mania was the suppression of drunkenness in his neighbourhood. He had

to set to work very slowly and tactfully, and the son still carries on the work inaugurated by his father. He bought up all the "Public Houses" on which he could lay hands, and paid such good prices that he soon owned all the licensed premises in the parish. His campaign for sobriety was carried on most sensibly. He made no attempt to stop the landlords from selling beer, wines and spirits, but he insisted on supplying them himself, and so arranged matters that though they could make a profit on the business, it should be a small one. Non-alcoholic drinks, however, he let them have on such advantageous terms that they got a great deal more on a bottle of lemonade than on two of beer. And since, no doubt under Divine dispensation, self-interest is the guiding principle in human life, it very soon came about that the sale of alcoholic beverages diminished to an unbelievable extent, and the race of drunkards in the district completely disappeared.

I think that this "new magnate" (the son of whom I have already mentioned) will soon be knighted. In the course of a few decades one of his descendants will, I hope, be raised to the Peerage. So much the better for the Peerage if he is, and so much the better for England. His promotion will represent official recognition of a solid position established in the course of several generations rather than a recompense for political services rendered to the Government.

He will, I think, be far more independent than he would otherwise have been, of all merely party loyalties. Very soon, so far at least as we foreigners are concerned, the heirs of these newly-created peers will have become typical Englishmen. I have already mentioned one son of a great banker, who seemed to me more English than the English.

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One typically aristocratic survival from an earlier age, what I might call a deliberately feudal system, is the way in which the work of justice is administered in country districts. The Lord Chancellor chooses the J.P.'s from among the local big-wigs, and his choice often falls on the biggest landed proprietors of the neighbourhood. The J.P. is unpaid, and deals with the simpler police-court cases. I am told that he never complains of the burden that this work entails. It is all part of a traditional and patriarchal way of life.

Let me give here a brief sketch of what we, in France, imagine that an English "Lord" looks like. He is tall and well-built. He has an easy, swinging gait. Usually he is fair-haired, with a high complexion, a happy expression, and a bright eye. He never makes unnecessary movements. His clothes are loose, well-cut, and never look new. Their material is one of those exquisite weaves of cunningly combined colours so subtly commingled as to achieve a sort of vitality of their own. They have the appearance of being some neutral product of the soil and to draw from it that smell which is so peculiarly their own. When he mounts his horse, or dismounts from it, his riding-breeches, with their faint hint of shine, sit so admirably upon him, that it is difficult to say whether they were made for his legs or his legs for them. His boots have the warm lights of fine old leather bindings. His horse has a bony and rather narrow head, a soft but intelligent eye, a smooth neck and prominent withers. He is long in the body and stands low on the ground. Like his master, he has a meek expression ("Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth"). The steel and leather fittings are impeccable and well-used.

The name and the character of this gentleman will transpire from the following quotation. It is thus that we French of an elder lineage like to envisage the typical English Lord. Our tastes, it would seem, are not so different from those of our friends across the Channel.

Lord Hartington's conscience was of a piece with the rest of him. It was not like Mr. Gladstone's, a salamander conscience . . . ; it was a commonplace affair. Lord Hartington himself would have muttered that it was a bore not to do the proper thing. He was usually bored, for one reason or another; but this particular form of boredom, he found more intense than all the rest. He would take endless pain to avoid it. Yet people seemed to have got it into their heads that he had some kind of special faculty in such matters—that there was some peculiar value in his judgment on a question of right or wrong. He could not understand why it was; but whenever there was a dispute about cards in a club, it was brought to him to settle. It was most odd. But it was true. In public affairs, no less than in private, Lord Hartington's decisions carried an extraordinary weight. The feeling of his idle friends in high society was shared by the great mass of the English people: here was a man they could trust. For indeed he was built on a pattern which was dear to his countrymen. It was not simply that he was honest: it was that his honesty was an English honesty—an honesty which naturally belonged to one who, so it seemed to them, was a living image of what an Englishman should be. In Lord Hartington they saw, embodied and glorified, the very qualities which were nearest to their hearts—impartiality, solidity, common-sense—the qualities by which they themselves longed to be distinguished, and by which, in their happier moments, they believed they were.

(This characteristic is essentially British. More

than other people, the English *believe* they are what they *would like* to be. It is one of the things which makes the French regard them as hypocrites—but the difference, if slight, is real.)

... Lord Hartington, who was never self-seeking, who was never excited, and who had no imagination at all. Everything they knew about him fitted into the picture, adding to their admiration and respect. His fondness for field sports gave them a feeling of security; and certainly there could be no nonsense about a man who confessed to two ambitions—to become prime minister and to win the Derby—for his inexactness—for refusing to make life a cut-and-dried business—for ramming an official despatch of high importance into his coat pocket and finding it there, still unopened, at Newmarket, several days later. They loved him for his hatred of fine sentiments; they were delighted when they heard that, at some function, on a florid speaker's avowing that 'this was the proudest moment of his life', Lord Hartington had growled in an undertone, 'the proudest moment of my life was when my pig won the prize at Skipton fair'. Above all they loved him for being dull. It was the greatest comfort with Lord Hartington, they could always be absolutely certain that he would never be impassioned or profound. . . . This inheritor of a splendid dukedom might almost have passed for a farm hand. Almost but not quite. For an air, that was difficult to explain, of preponderating authority lurked in the solid figure; and the lordly breeding of the house of Cavendish was visible in the large, long, bearded, unimpressible face. . . .¹

If newly-acquired wealth has turned out Lords on this model, it is a proof of the admirable nature of the institution. The Peerage is a living reality, since it can be so renewed and so modified.

¹ Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*.

The respect for heredity which has kept alive a House of Lords was manifested in a still more striking fashion during the crisis of Edward VIII's abdication. The Monarch's decision was taken as the result of a protest made by all the *élite* of the English people against a misalliance of their Sovereign. It was the old spirit of England that rose and said to its King: "I will maintain. . . ." ¹ Not for many years has an aristocracy given to the world so magnificent an example. All the friends of England on this side of the Channel applauded.

One of the consequences of the respect for heredity is the respect felt for the social hierarchy. This respect for a hierarchy is possible only when those at the top are worthy of their position. On that occasion those at the top of the English hierarchy showed that they were worthy of the country's confidence.

However official the hierarchy may be in England, it is accepted by everybody. This is not the case, could never be the case, in a democracy like our own, where hierarchy is solely a matter of official etiquette. A Frenchman of good stock has no respect for a Minister . . . except when such respect has to be formally expressed. He may think highly of him as a man, should he merit such consideration, but the very fact of his official position casts a doubt on his honesty. Perhaps one of the most unfortunate results of the democratic system (in the French meaning of the word democracy) is that officials *qua* officials are but little regarded. Nor is it unnatural that suspicion should attach to these public servants, who, as a result of the system, owe loyalty only to a Party and to its creatures, rather than to the country at large. Their partiality, their incapacity, their venality, have become pro-

¹ "Je maintiendrai" is the motto of the British crown.

verbial. England knows it well. That is why, when an English statesman has to show deference in dealing with a French colleague, he does so with a derisive air—and gets the best of the bargain.

Derisive deference—which comes from looking on France as a “poor relation”. Is not that the inner meaning of the words I am about to quote, which stress, without any intention of irony, the disadvantages involved in a form of government in which the Ministers speak only for a Party and have no security of tenure? They are taken from a speech by Mr. Winston Churchill (April 1938):

“... Mr. Chamberlain said the other day that we should take up arms in defence of France and Belgium. That is why we feel a natural desire to know who the men are who will be our partners, and if they are likely to remain sufficiently long in the positions they at present occupy. That, it seems to me, is a reasonable demand. . . .”

No one, I believe, could speak in such terms to the English Parliament without raising a storm. It is not the way in which one speaks to “gentlemen”. In a real Democracy, alas, Ministers are not necessarily gentlemen—even temporary gentlemen.

It has always seemed strange to me that English people, even when they are intelligent, even when they are men of the world, should be so ignorant of the fundamental differences that divide their régime and ours.

The truth is that since about 1878 France has been a Democratic Republic in the fullest sense of the word, in which all members of what corresponds to the English “Governing Class” have been severely ostra-

cized. The only exceptions to this hard law are to be found among those who have been willing to deny their own world and the ideas and principles in which they were brought up. But that is incredible! some one will object. No, merely logical. We are a Democracy: the people are ruled by the people and not by an *élite*—which is a very different thing. No doubt there is an exploiting *oligarchy*. Its members live off it, their hangers-on live off it; it numbers thousands, and there is no one, however humble his origins, who may not hope to enter it. But that does not constitute a reputable hierarchy.

Does the English Parliamentary System share, to any degree, in this vice of corruption? To French people the British Parliament seems very far removed from the picture which I have drawn of our own. Still, in a book written by an Englishman (Hilaire Belloc) the following lines occur:

"Everyone knows that the corruption natural to Parliaments . . . flourishes in the English Parliamentary system without provoking any violent reaction. . . . Everyone knows that when a scandal does occur in England it is exceptional, and that our public life can serve as a model for the rest of the world! . . . The English are convinced that it is better to keep the scandals of public life hidden from view. . . . This attitude . . . has contributed to the respect in which English public life is held abroad. . . ."

In France we are accustomed to *make use* of Ministers or local officials—not to respect them. The short time that they remain in office makes it impossible for them to learn their jobs or to get to know the people they govern. Almost all the local officials change each time that the parliamentary majority changes. Consequently, as Anatole France has well said: "We have

no State; we have only a series of Administrations; and the secrets of the State are the secrets of its Government Offices. . . ." Luckily, these Administrations contain many officials who, if they are not particularly amiable, are at least honest and even conscientious. Only—and I would ask my English friends never to forget this—the *real* France is not the same thing as the official France. Oppressed it may be, but it is sound at heart.

I have not yet said all I have to say about the characteristics of the Englishman at home. One of the chief of these is his confidence in the future. This is an immense element of strength. English Justice, independent as it is of any particular government (which, at any moment, may cease to be), knows that it will continue as long as the State continues. It follows an uninterrupted tradition, and therefore need never hesitate. The same is true for the whole machinery of government, for all the great departments, such, for instance, as the "Civil Service of India" (*sic*), the Admiralty, and the "Intelligence Service".

Such is this confidence in the future, this feeling of security, that the individual in England always plans far ahead. I know an Englishman who has recently entailed the whole of his property. "In that way", he told me, "I can ensure my heirs against having to pay succession duty for the next hundred and twenty years." A hundred and twenty years! What magnificent confidence that shows in the stability of British institutions. A hundred and twenty years, in the course of which a "board" composed of honourable men will decide the income needed by each holder of the name to maintain the dignity of his rank. After that time shall have elapsed (!), the representative, for

the nonce, of the family will be free to do what he likes with his inheritance, to sell, if he so wishes, or to establish a new entail!

It is impossible for a Frenchman to conceive of such a state of things—more's the pity!

In a democracy such as our own, the thoughts of a father of a family run on directly opposite lines. "What is the good", he argues, "of keeping my estate intact, of economizing, since the State will take all the savings that I have so carefully amassed. . . ." Not only are our laws often nothing but legalized spoliation, not only are they often retrospective, but they are, one and all, directed against the interests of the family and against the principle of inheritance. A democracy is concerned only for individuals.

I apologize for expatiating at such length on the French meaning of the word democracy. But I want it to be clearly understood that it stands for something totally different from the same word as used in England. Let me sum up by pointing out to my friends across the Channel that, before they can consider themselves a democracy, the following rules must be observed.

(1) They must have neither a King nor a hereditary peerage.

(2) Every post in every branch of public administration—civil service, justice, army, navy, colonial government, education, must be at the disposition of the party in power.

(3) The Judges must not be independent.

I have noticed that the English accept with resignation and in a spirit of confidence, onerous taxes, regimentation, and a host of troublesome obligations, because they believe that these sacrifices will ensure the continued existence of all that they hold dear. In

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France nobody feels like that. We know only too well that laws and taxes have only one end—the triumph of a party. On the rare occasions when England has submitted to laws based on class hatred, laws directed against the family, against property, against inheritance, then, and then only, has she been within measurable distance of democracy.

The spirit of independence is, in England, curiously mixed with a willingness to abide by the decisions of a majority. The first quality is noticeably aristocratic, the second essentially democratic. If they are united in the tradition-loving English, it is largely because there is a general feeling that the majority imposing the decisions is composed of Englishmen, that is to say, of gentlemen and aristocrats. The love of sport is also to some extent responsible. "This time the other 'side' has scored. We shall have our turn later. 'May the best boat win'—and the best boat happens to be ours, the boat that is navigated according to all the traditions of Old England."

The Englishman may obey the laws, but, for all that, he retains his liberty, a liberty which rests upon the strong foundations of the Kingdom, on the independent administration of Justice... and on tradition.

I well remember the enthusiastic applause which greeted a certain line in a London theatre. It was in the course of a Revue, one scene of which dealt with the South African war:

"I am an Imperial Yeoman and I want . . . independence."

To be a soldier, to proclaim the fact with pride, and, at the same time, to claim one's independence, one's liberty, is a paradox which would have made a French

audience laugh, so ridiculous would the idea of a soldier being independent have seemed. But we should be foolish to laugh. During the last war the voluntary soldiers of Great Britain had a perfect right to demand that the authorities should abide by the conditions of an agreement into which they had freely entered on enlistment. If the "Tommy" complained of the sameness of the jam issued to him in breakfast rations, those in high places backed him up. It was up to the A.S.C. to vary the issue in accordance with the letter of each man's engagement!

All this appears quite natural to the English because it is just. Let a soldier of the French Republic make only one such complaint . . . and he'll soon see!

Naturally, this spirit of independence is more prominent in time of peace. An Englishman's home is his castle, and no one can enter it without his permission. He knows that the "Act of Habeas Corpus" guarantees him against arbitrary detention. Any judge held to have contravened it would be liable to impeachment.

The team spirit is the direct outcome of this feeling for independence. For a long time it has ensured the superiority of the English in the fields of commerce and sport. Before other nations could even equal them, they had to imitate it in every particular.

English organization is nothing short of a marvel. It is completely successful, and thanks to it, the problem of the pleasant life has been most happily solved. This is how French people who know little of English life state (with a crudity for which I must beg my reader's pardon) the problem, its solution, and their own amazement:

"The English are not intelligent: they are lazy:

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they devote to work less time than any other people: their country is not particularly rich in natural resources . . . and yet, they are the richest nation in the world, and live a pleasanter, more varied existence than can be found anywhere else!"

It may be well to discuss in detail the different points of the problem thus raised.

In the first place, it is the universal habit in France to accuse the English of lack of intelligence—which only proves once more how utterly impossible it is for the two countries to understand one another.

That greatly misunderstood man Pontius Pilate asked, "What is Truth?"—and thereby showed his wisdom. It would be no less wise, in my opinion, to ask, "What is intelligence?" Before attempting to find an answer, let me modify the question by adding (1) "For the English, (2) "For the rest of Europe".

For Europeans in general, intelligence means the faculty of knowing, of understanding; the faculty that enables a mind to grasp the precise meaning of a word, the essential significance of an idea, and to deduce from words and ideas all sorts of consequences. It is the faculty, first of analysing a given complex, next of reaching a synthesis, finally of subsuming the results on a higher level under some general idea.

For the peoples of Europe, an intelligent man means a man who has keen insight, who can understand and assimilate any theory, and, sometimes, turn his findings to practical use.

For the English, an intelligent man is something quite different. He is a man who can turn to concrete and useful account, no matter on how small a scale, any given situation, any collection of given facts. The kind of intelligence which proceeds to general ideas without any immediately practical application, is regarded by

them as something tiresome, something that's "no good", as, in fact, a form of stupidity.

Intelligence, which is regarded as so important in France when summing up somebody's temperament, is not ranked nearly so high in England. It is even rather despised, so highly is character prized. This view may be right, since character is very much more useful to an individual and to a people than the intelligence which I am inclined to regard as excessive, and which has produced, among us, so many men with a natural aptitude for everything but no real *gift* for anything.

No one in England talks of an "intelligent fellow", but of a "clever fellow". He has shown cleverness, that is to say, he has known how to turn what lay before him to advantage. When dealing with savages he has not tried to instruct them in the beauties of the Social Contract; he has confined himself to selling them cotton goods. And I am not at all sure that he isn't right. He is "clever". He has set himself neither to understand others nor to make them understand him. He has made a good bargain. He will get a great deal further with his useless bits of cotton than others will get with their no less useless Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

If spiritual values play their part, they do so in helping trade! In the name of "decency" the Protestant Missionary will preach the advantages of uncomfortable cotton trousers! Even religion must be practical!

The "clever fellow", again, is he who does well whatever he sets out to do, without bothering about the "Categorical Imperative". One day the Corps to which I was attached in 1918 during my service with the British Army was visited by a decent enough chap, whom I soon judged to be nothing much mentally,

and whom my English comrades dubbed a "hopeless idiot". . . . But one day his good name was rehabilitated by Captain Lisle in the following terms:

"What's 'is name is not a fool at all. He played cricket for Cambridge in 19—. . . !" He was, in fact, quite "clever" in his own way: "not a fool at all". He knew how to catch a ball, and there was no more to be said. In France the statement which I have just quoted would have at once elicited from someone the reply: "still, he may be a perfect idiot!"

Which is right, the Continental or the Englishman? I am not sure. From my compatriot Montaigne I have taken the motto, "What do I know?" I think I am more sensitive than most to the boredom induced by fools and the charm of a keen wit, but I have known many intelligent men who bored me to distraction. They often do a lot of harm and give pleasure to no one. That, at least, cannot be said of a good cricketer. Nothing is more pleasant than to watch cricket well played, and I am sure that the "bl— fool" of whom I have just been speaking was, when it came to catching balls, "clever to his finger-tips".

Where work is concerned the problem is no less difficult of solution. The whole way of conceiving it, of doing it, is different on the two sides of the Channel. It is quite possible that, in certain cases, the French wear themselves out needlessly simply because their employers are *too* intelligent and, in their search for perfection, make things too complicated. Let me quote a case of what I mean. It may have no relevance. I give it for what it is worth. In France the engineers of the Renault Works have produced, during the last thirty years, an incalculable number of different car models. The Rolls-Royce Company in England has confined itself to very few, which have slowly been

improved and brought to perfection. . . . The Rolls-Royce bonnet may, like the Speaker's wig, be rather old-fashioned, but I, in my ignorance, should most certainly prefer to own an old Rolls rather than the newest of new Renaults. . . . My example, drawn from the field of mechanics, is still more applicable to that of politics. The hundred and ten Ministries with which the French nation has been saddled since the foundation of the Republic, often contained very intelligent, perhaps too intelligent, men. We know the mess in which they landed us. Over the same period England has had no more than a few dozen Governments composed, for the most part, of men who had a grave distrust of intelligence, and who, like Lord Hartington, "would never in any circumstances be either brilliant or subtle, or surprising, or impassioned, or profound. . . ." But those were the men who managed to keep for their country the leadership of the world.

Merely to have ideals, to be over-intelligent, serves, therefore, no useful purpose. What a country needs is, first, a stable social system; second, the power of keeping it; last, the ability to improve it. England is a model of such an organization. Consequently, there is no country where you will find more people engaged in "pulling their weight", and none where the inhabitants have to work less hard. England has fewer "leisured", and more rich, people than any other country in the world. Not that I despise leisure. As a career I believe it to be of extreme value to any community. It was the leisured people of France who, in the eighteenth century, brought French art and French literature to their highest point of perfection. True, to be able to use leisure as they used it, is in itself an art of which we to-day have lost the secret. (But to develop this thesis would need a volume to itself.)

OLD ENGLAND

Quite apart from their work (which consists in augmenting their fortunes) the rich folk of England play an important part in national life. They arrange the country's recreations, codify and organize their own and others' pleasures. To do as much is to do a most necessary work in a land so given over to "muscular epicureanism".

It seems to me that the "Governing Classes" really do govern, since it is they who "set the tone". They are responsible for what Trevelyan, the Cambridge historian, calls a "beneficent snobbery".

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE ENGLISH AT HOME: PRIVATE LIFE

THE numerous characteristics which a Frenchman finds himself observing among the English, are all directly connected with their inborn love of the elegancies of life, with what one might almost call the complexity of their epicureanism. Good manners are a form of respect which a man owes to himself and to others: they are the outward and visible sign of an agreement entered into mutually—it always being understood that the contracting parties are both of them gentlemen. What a man does is his own affair, and it is no one's business to be shocked by it. This feeling lies at the root of the whole aristocratic view of life; I am tempted to say, of all civilization. Modesty and self-control play a large part in this convention. Their opposites would attract attention—and that would be a bore for others to which they should not be exposed. The same holds true of discretion. A man doesn't ask questions any more than he talks about what he does. One must never speak to anyone about his profession: it would be tactless to do so,

just as it would be tactless to discuss the war when one happens to be taking part in it.

An Englishman learns from a very early age not to show his feelings. "The school was not encouraged to dwell on its emotions."¹ This gives an impersonal tone to social intercourse, but it puts a check on romanticism. Young people are taught not so much to work as to find an occupation. The one virtue above all others which is impressed upon them is that "Character is of more importance than knowledge". A man's life in England is as strictly ordered as that of a monk. Games, as well as meals, have a ritual value. Idleness is as little known as introspection—at least one hopes so.

The central point of all monastic life is the "annual retreat". During that time religious exercises are multiplied to an almost insane degree. The "Season" is the annual retreat of the English. It represents an appalling amount of work, even for those most highly endowed with the necessary qualities, though the work consists in doing nothing useful for weeks together. While the Season lasts, however, every hour of every day is a duty. Such is the price paid for epicureanism. There is a reverse to every medal. Besides, it is all part of the system. The whole business is so exhausting, so boring, that no one has any time to feel bored. . . .

The aim of English life is comfort—both physical and moral. Take love, for example. Sentiment is not allowed to enter into it: the whole business is relegated to the physical level. That makes it all so much more simple, so much more comfortable. One knows exactly what one wants and one makes the most of it. Simply a question of hygiene. Besides, in the Colonies.

¹ R. Kipling.

... Well, that is how the whole of Europe regarded love in the sixteenth century.

Material comfort, though originally it was an invention of the English, has tended to remain rather stationary. Many English hotels are still in the 1910 stage. The French are amazed at the absence from English bath-rooms of all the more recent perfections.... Perhaps over-refinement is thought to breed softness!

Perhaps I ought not to include the love of hygiene among the attractive characteristics of the English. The way in which it finds expression is the very antithesis of comfortable. It imposes on its devotees a series of endless inconveniences, the worst of which are cold and draughts. I have said that the English are, of all people, the most inclined to think of themselves as possessing the qualities they would like to possess. Good health is one of these, and so is courage. Both are qualities, to a certain extent interdependent, which do not come naturally to the English of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and that is why their whole education, social as well as literary, is designed to develop them. The superb English soldier is far less capable of enduring fatigue than the less sturdy French or Italian. All the more reason for multiplying draughts in their homes!

The ritual nature of this life, which is monastic in the careful allotment of special forms of exercise to every hour of the day and year, involves, naturally, the wearing of certain special kinds of clothing—which are sacrosanct. They are traditional rather than practical. Little caps and long white trousers are not really ideal for games like cricket and tennis. But it is only quite recently that men, and even women, have been allowed to wear "shorts". If practicality were

the only consideration a boxing get-up would be far better.

More than in any other country, what is or is not convenient has to yield to what is or is not "done". Fortunately, there are always a certain number of charming young people anxious to make the best of themselves, and, of course, there are always a number of old and censorious persons ready to find the new ways ugly or improper.

The conception of modesty has evolved like everything else in this world. Victorian standards were ridiculous: nevertheless, small boys were allowed to bathe naked. All honour to the Victorians, for in those days the wretched schoolboys of France were compelled to wear hideous and uncomfortable swimming suits.

The French are usually amazed by the coldness of the relations existing between English parents and children. We are more expansive, just as we are more prodigal of gesture. But the real, underlying feeling cannot be deduced from its habitual expression. All the same, we are appalled at the idea that an English mother can kiss her son on the lips! "What is truth on one side of the Channel is error on the other."

One of the happiest customs of the unknown isle is the absence of "tutoiement"—that temptation to slovenliness and vulgarity. One can never sufficiently stress the increase in gross familiarity to which the custom has given rise in France, especially since the war.

Conversation on the other side of the Channel is not brilliant: that is to say, it remains on the level of those who take part in it. French people like either to climb so high conversationally that they are overcome with giddiness, or go so deep that they are in danger of suffocation. This is sometimes called love of meta-

physics. A wise man has defined it as "a conversation in which the speaker does not know what he is talking about, and the listener has no idea of what is being said to him". The Englishman is well advised not to trust to his own speculative intelligence (in the philosophic sense of the term). With us, on the other hand, everyone loves what is called "playing with ideas"—which is often no more than playing with words.

In England, conversation remains severely concrete. It excels in the telling of stories. They are told, it is true, always in the same way and in the same terms, sometimes at excessive length. But the point is always admirably made. The only trouble is that every Englishman has a way of repeating rather too often "his best joke" or his "best story".

If the abstract plays the part of a Medusa's head in British conversation, if the fear of general ideas is so prevalent that they are short-circuited with a joke, it is a very sensible habit to confine talk to what a man knows. Of this the speaker in England is always well aware, whether the subject under discussion be drunkenness in the lower classes or the cure for mange among foxes. This tendency is apparent in English newspapers and English books.

It is not my intention to make a comparison between the literatures of England and France: they are as different as are the two nations. But I should like to point out that in matters of detail the English author is always better informed than the French. This is a true generalization, except when an English writer sets himself to deal with France—its mentality, its habits, and its way of life. It is quite obvious that he knows nothing whatever about such things. But when the matter under discussion is concrete (and English), it is rare to find a book or a paper committing real sole-

cisms. The kind of idiotic account of a fox hunt quoted by R. S. Surtees in *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour* would never, I think, appear in an English paper. But this very year, I read in a French review an article on hunting, in no wise intended to be comic, which contained the following advice. "A man must be properly dressed for hunting: that is, he must wear a short black coat and light trousers." Blunders of this kind are the rule rather than the exception. Many novelists, sometimes very distinguished ones, go absurdly wrong when they describe their heroes mounting a horse, and the great Victor Hugo himself, whose technical vocabulary was immense, in matters, for instance, connected with the sea, actually confuses the bowsprit and the mizen-mast. Few Frenchmen would regard that as a fault, but it certainly is, and an offence against good taste.

Many Frenchmen imagine that the English are lacking in taste—though just the contrary is true. Taste should never be confounded with erudition. The first is inborn or acquired in the school of life, the second is a matter of book learning and comes from study. The English have delicacy of perception to a high degree, but they dislike erudition and, especially, pedantry. Their taste may not always be informed, but it is as a rule very sure.

I know no better proof of this than their way of arranging, or, if I may so express it, "putting across" their public monuments. English Cathedrals, for example, are always set in an exquisite framework of open space and greenery. When old things are restored the work is invariably done with much wisdom. England is probably the one country in the world where restoration does not destroy the charm of what is restored.

Another proof, whether of taste or of tact, is the care taken to-day to avoid putting up staring new buildings. In this matter nothing could be more admirable than English modesty. I know a number of fine houses in London with only a very small frontage to the street, and others, in the country, which are carefully sited with the same anxious avoidance of ostentation.

So far as architecture itself goes, if one compares a few hundred country houses built in France between the years 1880 and 1914, with an equal number of houses in England of the same period and of the same approximate size, it is in England that one will find the fewest horrors. My English comrades often made me feel the truth of this when, in the French countryside through which, alas, we moved to and fro so often during the war, we came on, whether ruined or intact, what they were so fond of calling "a typical French *chalet*".

I often explained to them that French taste has suffered an eclipse extending from the end of the regrettable Second Empire—that heaven of the *parvenu*—and that genuine French taste was active for centuries, during which it created little that was not a masterpiece whether on a large or a small scale, until the French Revolution put an end to it.

French people visiting England, like Europeans visiting Egypt, should take a preliminary course in art. The truth lies not in the saying that "there's no discussing matters of taste and colour", but, on the contrary, in the axiom laid down by La Bruyère that "there is good taste and there is bad taste, and the discussion of taste is a discussion of fundamentals".

French taste has had an extraordinary history. Up to the end of the eighteenth century it produced a

number of incomparable works of art. When the *élite* of the nation was suppressed nothing remained but the "average Frenchman", as he has been called, and the average Frenchman is the victim of text-books and of innovators who like nothing so much as to stagger him and pull his leg. The trouble is that this average Frenchman has remained convinced that his judgments are infallible. He is intelligent, too intelligent, but he lacks that background which was provided by a society of men and women whose taste had been refined by inheritance and education. France now has neither that informed public opinion which was the contribution of such a society, nor those enlightened patrons of art who could inspire new works. The public opinion to which I refer was voiced by many different categories of society, from the Court, the gentle-folk, the magistrates, and the rich bourgeois families, down to the admirable workmen of those Craft Guilds, who were characterized by a high degree of conscientiousness and knowledge, and prevented by the rules of their Corporations from producing inferior work. . . . It is a far call from such a public to the flat level of the mob to-day whose taste has been vulgarized by the cinema and the wireless.

I maintain that in contemporary France writers, painters, sculptors and architects of talent have cheapened their gifts because they know that they can always succeed by enlisting the patronage of friends of the government or by pulling wool over the eyes of fools. I regret those days when a great noble (often more ignorant than they) could have artists beaten if they carried out his instructions in a way that was an offence to good taste. An appalling idea! say you. Perhaps: but how much more appalling to impose on the public the execrable taste exhibited by all these

horrors which are there for everyone to see, and have the effect merely of perverting what little good taste remains.

If I have been tempted into this digression it is only because I wanted to explain why taste has ceased to exist, and because I deplore anything that tends to dishonour my country. Not the least of the curses of the French Revolution is that it started taste on its downward path, and is thus indirectly responsible for the disappearance of the artist's and the craftsman's conscience. The last artists and the last workmen to be born and educated in the true tradition died round about 1850 or a little later. Their pupils and successors had already broken free from the old discipline. Their orders came for the most part from the newly-enriched, whose bad taste was contagious and flowered in those "typical French chateaus" to which I have referred, and in all that they contained in the way of furniture, pictures and statues.

During the period dating from the beginning of the nineteenth century to our own times, I am inclined to think that good taste in architecture has been largely confined to the other side of the Channel.

In the building of dwelling houses, especially of the small and middling size, the English have attained a standard of perfection in comfort which we, here, are only now beginning to imitate.

But be that as it may, many of my compatriots never bother their heads about studying English architecture. Faced by unaccustomed forms they merely exclaim "I don't like that", or "that seems to me frightful". Such is the reaction of a great many French people when confronted not only with the harmonious compositions of the sixteenth century, and the dignified buildings of the seventeenth and eighteenth, but also in their criti-

cism of the smaller houses of the latter period, such as those put up by the Adams brothers in London, which attained a high degree of perfection in their exquisite proportions and in the simplicity of their style, admitting, as it did, but the bare minimum of fine detail. Examples of what I mean are to be found in Lincoln's Inn Fields. To those who are slow in recognizing their beauty, I would say, in the words of Charles Maurras, "when an honest man is bored by beauty, it is time for him to examine his heart and to correct his taste".

Good taste is more usually to be found in discretion than in that ostentation which the English hold in abhorrence. They excel in the ability to modify without destroying, to provide for comfort without doing away with the old. I know one "boudoir" in a sixteenth century country house in which a number of fine pictures, including a Lely, are to be found cheek by jowl with huge Bibles of the time of Robert Estienne and comfortable armchairs belonging to the twentieth century, without the general sense of pleasant, may I say, comfortable harmony being in any way broken. What a lesson for certain "stylists", who will do anything to keep the entire contents of a room completely in "period". To be logical they ought to travel in ox-waggons and use nothing but torches for light. But life has got to be lived, and life is a matter of constant change.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE ENGLISH AT HOME: THEIR FAULTS

THE English suffer from many faults, public, social, and private. Take, for instance, their immoderate craving for money, which goes hand in hand with a power of wasting it which is unequalled elsewhere. This, perhaps, is a blemish inherent in a country of which the governing aristocracy is both rich and lavish, and where the general standard of wealth produces conditions which, though extravagant, have much to be said for them. The wastage that goes on in a democracy springs from other causes and leads to other results. Where government lacks stability and successive troops of needy office-seekers tread hard on one another's heels, the individual is intent on filling his own pockets and those of his friends.

I know nothing about the prevalence of bribery in England. In France our elected legislators treat it so much as a matter of course that it is always provided for in public estimates, and a certain amount of money always sticks to the hands of those members of any

body responsible for putting work in hand. The French people, however, are not willing partners in the deal. If this rotten state of affairs exists among the English, it is, I think, rather more carefully disguised, and that may be better: I don't know. But I feel it my duty once more to quote the opinion of an English author writing for a French public.¹ He asserts that the commercial spirit of his country excuses the sort of thing I have been speaking of. "For men say on all sides, and with some justice: 'He did but take advantage of his position to make money, and that is what, after all, men must do if, under stress of competition, they are to survive. His private enrichment did no great harm to the State, and to enrich oneself is the principal occupation of man. Moreover, he caused no individual loss. He showed no spite. There was an element of risk in his operations—so let us pass them over in silence.' " Belloc attributes this manner of thinking and acting even more to an elevated sense of patriotism than to the commercial spirit. The Frenchman is inclined to regard it as hypocrisy.

Is English hypocrisy, so far as general behaviour goes, a good or an evil? It is hard to say. The French on the whole appear to glory in their vices. That may be because they are less corrupted than the English who take such pains to disguise them. I am naturally inclined to believe that few nations have a more solid foundation of virtues than the French—though I am not, of course, speaking here of the politicians and their hangers-on. They are representative of only a very small part of the population. They are despicable, and are, in fact, despised by all, even by those who make use of them. May I quote here something said

¹ Hilaire Belloc, *Essay on the Nature of Contemporary England*.

THE ENGLISH AT HOME: THEIR FAULTS

by Shane Leslie:¹ "There is no reason to consider English public men more moral than the French, except that they must be careful not to be found out."

The religious point of view is of great importance. I have met few Englishmen with a living religious faith of any kind. I rather think that the expression "Christian England", to be found in the writings of certain authors, can be classed among those phrases which embody a respect for the past. Still, the King is styled "Defender of the Faith". The point to decide is whether that Faith is still a reality. If it means respect for the Bible, then, perhaps, the answer must be yes, though here it is necessary to stress the importance given to the Hebraic elements in that book. But for the Jew, no less than for the pure-blooded Englishman, religion to-day is little more than a harmless and respectable tradition like any other. There is, of course, a vague Deism. The Englishman has a kindly feeling for the ministers of the various denominations. The Lord of the Manor retains the right to appoint the clergyman who watches over the souls of his parishioners. The former may not believe over-much in the latter's religion, but he regards him as a decent enough fellow who does a certain amount of good. If he attends the Church Services he does so as a social duty—to give a good example. It is rare to find this attitude among French men of the world.

An Englishman's religion is more often a question of tact than of theology. He is more anxious to save appearances than souls. Religion is an official business and its dignitaries occupy a definite place in the hierarchy. Consequently, Anglicanism should be defined as a state of mind peculiar to the English rather than as "belief" in the strict sense of the word, a state of

¹ *The End of a Chapter*, p. 105.

mind that conforms to tradition and implies little sense of mystery. It is a remarkable fact that the most famous Anglicans have often been laymen, and that Mr. Gladstone had probably as much influence in the Church as the Archbishop of Canterbury.

If the playing of games is as good for the morals as it is for the body, if it develops a sort of brotherhood of arms, a solidarity between men of different social classes, the fault of this love of games in England is that it tends to become passive rather than active. I mean that, since games have become shows, for every ten who play there are tens of thousands who only watch. This fault is even more apparent in other countries.

Sport, both as an employment and as a show, is to be found (if I may so express it) in the habits of the English Parliament. The "Speaker" of the House of Commons is, as it were, an umpire whose duty it is to see that the (parliamentary) rules are observed. This is what especially distinguishes English parliamentary methods from those of other lands. It is what also distinguishes the English method of conducting a war from that of the French and the Germans.

Specialization—so opposed to the spirit of Sport—is American rather than English. Gentlemen belonging to different professions used to like rowing on the Thames for their relaxation, and held each year a competition which was open to all amateurs. The Americans, set on winning this competition, first chose and then trained a crew which was duly entered, and which very naturally won. It was all quite opposed to the spirit of "fair play", but it was very American. To my mind, it was a great deal worse than that, for it ran counter to the whole spirit of sport as it had till then been understood in England and taught to, or revived among, the other nations of the world. The evil ten-

dency had been started. Since then it has merely got worse. The consequent abuse of games has gone so far that one wonders whether steps ought not to be taken to suppress altogether so-called sporting events which, like some football matches, are nothing but brutal combats. It must be admitted that the English are now almost the only people who play games like gentlemen.

Is it true to say that the presence of the English in India can be described in some such words as the following? "We look after your finances, we take steps to prevent famine, we stop your internal squabbles. In return for this our Civil Servants must be well paid, we must be allowed to shoot your tigers and spear your wild pig. We are only too glad to admit that we have learned one good thing from you—the game of Polo."

The distortion which has made into a show what was once a physical exercise, is one of the many things due to an insidious misuse of words. Just as the former barn is still left standing *but* has become a covered Badminton court, so, too, cricket holds still its honoured place, *but* it has become an occasion for watching professional players instead of being a game in which all take part. . . . Many people are content merely to read the result of matches.

So far as faults which have no connection with public life are concerned, we all have those in plenty, and this book is not intended to be an examination of conscience for the benefit of others. Still, I do think that English conversation is often "dull", and that this "dullness" is often the sign of a want of spirituality. A man who is concerned only with facts does sometimes fall into a materialism which, practical though it may be, is often pretty dense.

I remember during the war meeting a nice fellow

called Cannon. In private life he had been a quiet clerk in a city office, but the war had turned him into an officer with a love of tennis and whisky, to whom I took a liking the very first time we met, because he was so honest, so kindly, so cheerful, so willing to do anything one asked him. At the end of a week I knew him pretty well, and had even been made privy to his "hobby"—which was to bring up his only daughter as an anarchist (not that he ever used the word), I mean devoid of all belief, of all moral restrictions, and taught to rely only on the natural goodness of her nature. He was, in short, a J. J. Rousseau of the twentieth century! But I soon saw that this "hobby" of his had absolutely no rational basis. It was a fad, nothing more. So far as all subjects were concerned which might have provided matters of conversation, I realized that Cannon was completely without ideas, or remarkably reticent. Finally, I said to him one day: "My dear Cannon, it took me just a week to become your friend. It is now six months since we met, we have seen one another every day, and I know you no better than I did at the beginning." His answer was: "But, my dear chap, don't you realize that you know everything about me that there is to be known." It was perfectly true. I realized that in the long months to come. Conversationalists of his type do not add to the excitements of social intercourse, but at least they are usually discreet and restful. They don't overwork the brain. It is all very healthy.

To be a gentleman it is not at all necessary to be able to carry on an intellectual conversation. In the long run there is nothing less fatiguing than to spend one's days in the company of the well-bred. It would be paradoxical to maintain that one meets nobody in England who is not well-bred; but there is, more or

less, in all circles, a certain atmosphere of urbanity, combined with a relative degree of sartorial elegance which avoids the extremes of unconventionality. I am told that this sophisticated correctness is becoming already a thing of the past. If so, I regret the change, for I regard the desire of the common people in England to pass for gentlemen as something very far from ridiculous. It may, at times, provoke a smile, but it is a praiseworthy ambition, and is all of a piece with that universal aristocratic "slant" which I have already noticed as being so typical of all classes there.

I trust that my remarks on religion as it is understood in England have not transgressed the dictates of discretion. I should like to add a few words on the subject of superstition. The following incident came within my personal experience in December 1917.

I have never been so staggered, whether as a civilian or as a soldier. A Staff-Officer named Muddy and I were coming back together from a longish walk. It was bitterly cold and snow lay on the ground. We were stepping out briskly when Muddy suddenly stopped, as though he had come up against some invisible obstacle, and turned sharply towards what I could only suppose was some supernatural vision, though I could see nothing. He made a profound obeisance, and stood for a while in an attitude of suppliant adoration. Thinking that perhaps his mental balance had been affected by the recent enemy air-raids, I watched him for a moment or two before feeling it to be my duty to shake him out of his trance:

"Hello, old chap, what's the matter?"

He signed to me not to interrupt. Was it I who was dreaming? . . . Putting an end, at last, to his meditation with an even deeper bow, he turned to me and said in a low voice, and with an air of reproach:

"Haven't you seen?"

I was too much nonplussed to reply. I still could see nothing. . . .

"Haven't you seen?" he said again, nodding towards the east.

"Wh—at?" I managed to ask.

"The new moon. . . .!"

"Y—e—s."

As a matter of fact, a tiny crescent of moon was just visible. . . . I understood less and less what was the matter with him. Muddy was almost indignant. At last, he consented to explain in a low voice, and as though overcome by the gravity of the occasion, that when one saw the new moon for the first time, one ought always to greet it with a prayer, ought always to wish. . . .

These wretched Frenchmen believe in nothing! The ancient worship of Selene still lives! How fervent were the prayers of that red-banded Staff-officer! What seriousness, what conviction, what scorn for merely human values, was expressed in his attitude! No, faith is certainly not dead!

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ENGLISHMEN ABROAD

THEY fall into two classes: those who settle down as though for good, and form what in France we should call the English Colony of such and such a place: and those who, as soon as they reach their destination, proceed to mix with the population of approximately the same social standing as their own.

They first install themselves with an air of permanence. Wherever ten Englishmen are gathered together, whether it be at the North Pole or on the Equator, they make at once a little England marked with all the good, the serious, even the childish, characteristics of the Mother Country. Good manners rule. They wear their traditional clothes, modified to suit the climate, but always suited to the hour and the occupation of the moment. Sport is held in honour, every sport to which they are addicted in Old England, or others as like them as possible. Pig-sticking, for instance, takes the place of fox-hunting, etc. The usual social observances are transported wholesale into the new land; the usual drinks are drunk. The

system has this happy result, that, since the amenities of the Homeland are not lost, expatriation loses its horrors. It is a pleasant application of the old formula, "Ubi bene, ibi patria".

A compact group, whether large or small, is formed, which at once imposes respect, not only when the country in question is an English possession filled with "natives", but in Europe as well. Correctness, good behaviour, elegance, manners, pleasures, become at once the standard by which life is to be lived. Such, for instance, are the English in Rome, at Pau, and elsewhere.

The Englishman in an English possession is sure of himself, self-centred, condescending, usually well-behaved, and extremely suspicious of the "natives". His pharisaism stands him in good stead. He is always quite convinced that whatever he may do for the well-being of England, must without question, be "Ad maiorem Dei gloriam". His professional conscience is never made uncomfortable. He will be untiring in his endeavour to save whole populations from flood and famine. With no less a serenity he will send his aeroplanes to bomb and destroy whole villages and their defenceless inhabitants in the name of that "order" which must reign everywhere, or as a punishment for some murder that may have been committed. The guarding of frontiers thus becomes a simple matter (e.g. in Transjordan and on the confines of Arabia).

Upright and cruel, convinced of his right to act thus, he maintains a pitiless rule in the manner of Ghengiz Khan, the "inflexible Emperor". He has even invented the magnificent word "loyalist" to designate the man who will betray his own people, if need be, in the interests of the invader. In matters of business he will be honourable and ruthless, will

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exercise to the last jot and tittle what he holds to be his right, satisfied by the dictates of his English conscience. This is what he calls "fair play".

The bonds of solidarity unite him to the other English of the place, and to those in the neighbourhood, even if it be at some distance. He is sure of himself because he is English; he is sure of England because it is his native land. He knows that he can count on her. He knows that she will make him respected, will support and defend him, will, if necessary, avenge his death.

If he is in a foreign country simply for his pleasure, he will very soon make himself appreciated in the circles he frequents. His good manners and his good nature will soon breed liking.

Everywhere in the world one will find Englishmen comfortably settled, from the moral as well as the material point of view, and often forming part of the very best society. Their houses are, as a rule, extremely pleasant and arranged with taste. Their natural sensitiveness will often make them responsive to nuances of style in a way that a more informed intelligence would never do. They will always give the impression of being perfectly at home.

The travelling Englishman is entirely different from the Englishman settled abroad. His lack of ceremony has become proverbial. He dresses as though he were among barbarians. Though in London he would never dream of going to Covent Garden except in tails and a white tie, he will have no hesitation about attending the Opera in Paris dressed in a lounge-suit and cap. He deliberately behaves as though he were in a conquered country, and his air is insolent beyond all belief. He quite genuinely regards as blameworthy all customs which do not happen to be his own.

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He shows the same tendency which I noticed during the war among officers and privates alike, to look on the French population as a collection of "damned natives".

Such manners, I repeat, are confined to travellers on the move, who are far from belonging to the *élite* among their countrymen. The English settled abroad are, on the contrary, polite, and consequently are well received everywhere.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE ENGLISH AS A RACE. THE POLITICAL PROBLEM

I KNOW that in dealing with the English as a race I am touching on a thorny subject. I am resigned to the fact that very few of them will understand what I mean.

One fact is obvious. What, on one side of the Channel, passes for patriotism, is often regarded in France as evidence of "the bad faith of Perfidious Albion". It is a very special characteristic and breeds from time to time in all European countries (luckily for England not simultaneously) a feeling of invincible antipathy. But here once again it is necessary to draw distinctions. On one side we have the Europeans—the French, the Germans, the Spaniards, the Italians, the Belgians, the Dutch, the Swiss, etc. All these people, so far as foreign policy is concerned, are guilty of impulses, contradictions, lack of frankness, breaches of good faith. When a German or a Frenchman or an Italian lies, everyone knows that he does what he does because he thinks it necessary for the good of his

country. On the other side we have the English. The bad faith of an Englishman is something entirely different. He wants to make people think that he is disinterested, that when in fact he acts in the sordid interests of commerce, he is obeying only the dictates of virtue and justice. The extraordinary thing is that he believes it himself, or seems to.

Those who supported Mr Eden in his policy of "suffocating" Italy during the latter's campaign in Abyssinia quite sincerely thought that they were acting in the name of justice and civilization. It would have been quite useless to remind (as I have frequently done) various honourable old ladies and "young" women of a certain age, that England has from time to time gathered in tracts of territory spread all over the world, that her right to these conquests is, to say the least, questionable, that terrible reprisals have been taken by the English in every quarter of the globe, and, as a last resort, that the Abyssinians were in the habit of burning human beings alive, and had imposed a harsh tyranny on the rest of Ethiopia. No! their indignation was perfectly sincere.

It is this sincere hypocrisy which has given rise to those waves of hatred against England to which I have referred, and which (as a friend) I should like to point out, are always a possible source of danger. This violent antipathy has more than once found expression in France, notably at the time of Fashoda, during the South African war, when Italy set out to conquer Abyssinia, and at other periods. The English have never been able to understand that their conduct in certain circumstances is regarded by their neighbours as evidence of an intolerable pharisaism. They never will understand it. Warwick, in the words of Bernard Shaw, has shown us why: "I apologise to you for the

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word used by Messire John de Stagamber. It does not mean in England what it does in France. In your language *traitor* means betrayer; one who is perfidious, treacherous, unfaithful, disloyal. In our country it means simply one who is not wholly devoted to our English interests."

I do not know whether I have been able, not to explain why, but to show how, so often the English and the French have failed to understand one another. That does not alter the fact that an Englishman can quite easily manage to live in France like a Frenchman, or inversely, that a Frenchman can live in England like an Englishman. When that happens, the individual in question no longer *thinks* in the terms of his nationality.

One example of the Englishman's inability to understand the French is his attitude towards our internal policy. So unsuited are we to the representative system that we obey the ruling of the majority only when constrained and forced to do so. That fact disturbs them, accustomed as they are to seeing Right and Left represented by people of more or less the same upbringing. They ask, for instance, why it is that men like me complain of our Government and yet refuse to take a hand in it. They do *not* understand that we have been driven from public life, and that we could only enter it again at the cost of being false to our loyalties. We believe in a certain ideal, in certain social rules, in certain liberties, and in certain family, moral and religious traditions, which we should first of all have to abandon.

We know how France was made great, and we hate to see her diminished. But the English are fully aware of the fact that France's weakness meant the greatness of England in the world. Before the head

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of France could be brought low it was first necessary that the French themselves should weaken her. That weakening was the work of the French Revolution which, like many other revolutions, was prepared and financed by England. It had one object, and one only: to sap the strength of an adversary.

I shall be told that the fomenting of revolution in France was a reprisal against Louis XVI for the support he had given to the American "insurgents". This support was, beyond any doubt, the worst of all the blunders committed during the reign of that monarch, and the one which conditioned all that was to follow. It was the lie in the soul.

From this initial foolishness flowed all the madness of the years to come. The word Liberty became the rallying sign for a lot of perfectly decent people, who thereupon set themselves to undermine the house in which they lived, the most complete civilization which the world had seen for centuries.

But the harm done to England by the Declaration of Independence by the United States bears no comparison with the harm done to the whole world by the French Revolution, harm which may still lead in the long run to the collapse of England in her turn.

It should be unnecessary to add that we French of the minority understand loyalty in a far stricter sense than do the English, and that we are always ready to push it to the extreme of complete devotion and utter self-sacrifice.

Loyalty to a fallen king has kept more than one Frenchman out of active politics. Is not that better than the hunger for power which will stop at nothing to attain its end?

It certainly is extremely comic to hear the King of England in person speaking of ideas dear to the two

democracies. Those who know both agree with me, and realize that many of the principles dear to all Englishmen are matters of detestation to the politicians of our own country. Unfortunately, those who play with fire sometimes get burned. Will the famous insularity of Great Britain always be a sufficient protection against this particular danger?

British policy has for centuries been based upon the development of British trade, upon the opening up of new markets and the securing of naval lines of communication. The real question is—are all means justified for the attainment of the desired end? No one can foretell the future. My English friend will say that I am venturing into the field of philosophy. Perhaps I am, but this at least I know:

*There are more things in heaven and earth, MY DEAR FRIEND
Than are dreamt of in all MY philosophy.*

But, I might add, "and in all *your* politics. . . ."

For if your unique English system has worked until now, is it certain that it will work always? You accept the laws made by a majority because you know that the next majority will modify them. You have confidence in the wisdom of your people. Still, you make no attempt to check its enthusiasm for those who are the enemies of your institutions. I have said that you have enemies within your ranks: and they hate your institutions quite as bitterly as do their genuinely democratic friends.

You make a pretence of treating as gentlemen French Ministers who are not even temporarily entitled to the name. On the other hand, a great English conservative newspaper has seen fit to blackguard one of the greatest men of contemporary France, Charles Maurras, than whom none knows better the value of the British

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alliance, though he does not confuse words and things.

It is difficult not to become a little bitter when we see your King, your Queen, and your great Lords, smiling repeatedly on men who are nourished on a hatred of all royalty and all nobility. Is sincerity to be for ever obscured by self-interest?

Oddly enough, England, after doing all in its power to aid in France the enemies of Louis XVI, welcomed with warm hospitality that king's brothers, the Comte de Provence, the Comte d'Artois, and all the nobles who sought on her shores a refuge against the atrocities of our Revolution. Perhaps that was all part of the sporting spirit. The defeated team is no longer regarded as an adversary: on the contrary, its members are offered drinks. Or was the contradiction due to a persistence of those chivalrous traditions which are a mark of naval warfare? The sailor does all he can to rescue from the sea those whom he has done his best to drown!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

CRACKS IN THE BUILDING. ANTICIPATIONS

DID the great British Empire reach its period of maturity round about 1900? Did the last war, by extending its bounds, make it still stronger? Can it increase further? Will Great Britain revert, as Gladstone wished it to, to a "little Englander" policy?

Almost all Frenchmen believe that England could have prevented the war of 1914 by announcing solemnly that she would mobilize her full strength should Belgian territory be violated to however small a degree. I do not say that such an attitude was possible for the then British government, or that it would have been carried through. The greater part of the nation believed that the question at issue was one that did not interest them. They did not realize the danger until the last moment. But we found that their "wait and see" methods cost us dear. It caused the sacrifice of innumerable French lives and the destruction of the whole wealth of France. Many of us hoped that we

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should have some compensation for what we had endured, if not by getting the Rhine frontier, at least by seeing an independent Rhineland, removed from the orbit of Prussian influence. Nothing of the sort happened, and the Washington Treaty, which reduced us to the position of a secondary naval power, appeared to us disastrous.

The French think that, at the moment, England has reduced her land forces to a dangerous point.¹ We cannot help wondering whether once again our country may not be the scene of a European war, whether, if such a thing were to happen, France might not be destroyed root and branch before her allies could come to her aid from across the Channel. . . .

A friend, an ally, ought not to be blind. And since this chapter, which will be short, is entitled "Cracks", here are a few of those that I see in the edifice, the magnificent edifice, of British power.

(1) Ireland gave much cause for anxiety during the last war. What would be her attitude in the event of another? Throughout the post-war years the Irish have shown great hostility to all who "served" under the Union Jack. It might be necessary to carry out a military occupation of the country, to prevent it from becoming a naval and aerial base for Germany. This would immobilize a large part of the British army, while the absence of an Irish contingent would seriously weaken it.

(2) The overseas territories of Great Britain and the countries living under British protection have greatly increased in number. Palestine is especially vulnerable. Could all these lands be adequately protected against an enemy attack from the air?

(3) In case of a world conflict, would the vast con-

¹ Written at the end of 1938.

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continent of India be in a position to supply anything like the revenue which came from it in 1914? The same problem holds for Australia. Many independent countries, such as Mexico, the Argentine, and China, are in fact tributary to Great Britain financially by reason of the interest they have to find on loans or on private investments. Do they, and would they, be the source of as much wealth as they have been heretofore? Mexico, unfortunately, is no longer in question. Revenue still comes from the Argentine, but how much longer will that be the case? The monetary value of China has much diminished.

(4) In the event of a war, is it certain that Egypt could be defended? Is it not likely that she would be drawn into an anti-English policy?

(5) Italy? I do not think that sufficient stress has ever been laid on the determining part that she played in the last war. If she had declared against the Allies in 1915, they would have been lost. It is the fashion in France to belittle the achievements of the Italian army. Be that as it may, they forced the Central Empires to detach a number of Army Corps which would have been quite sufficient to throw out the whole balance of man-power on the Western Front, and, had they been against us, we should have had to weaken our defences in order to maintain an army on the line of the Alps. I am inclined to think that the attitude of Italy would be decisive in any fresh conflict. She betrayed her Austro-German allies in 1915, and she might do so again. I hope she would. Obviously she would decide as interest dictated, according to what was promised her and according to her estimate of the probable chances of victory. It should never be forgotten that her strength on land, sea and in the air, is very different from what it was in 1915, or that she is

in a position to dominate the whole of the Mediterranean (Sicily, Pantellaria, Tripoli).

We must have confidence in the wisdom of future British governments. We French were almost unanimous in feeling gratitude to Mr Chamberlain for preventing the outbreak of a war which we certainly could not have supported. The whole world, moreover (save for the Communists and some of their Socialist friends), was opposed to such a war. The smoothness with which we carried out partial mobilization deceived a number of English Conservatives. (Obedience is not the same thing as enthusiasm, or even as willingness.) Our British allies were no more in a position to act than we were. We hope that now, whatever new crises may arise from day to day, we shall be better equipped to oppose a formal veto to renewed demands.

I have spoken of anticipations. . . . As ancient Rome grew larger she found it impossible to supply a sufficient number of Romans to defend her frontiers or administer her Empire. But it is not so much with Rome that one should compare the British Empire, as with the Carthage of antiquity, or with Venice in the modern world. Like those two commercial and maritime Republics, she needs mercenaries, and must spend vast sums to keep her fleet in being. She is faced, too, by a danger that was unknown to Carthage and to Venice—the air. Will the aeroplane spell her doom as mistress of the seas? With the development of flying, what becomes of her precious insularity?

Will the British Empire become a melting pot for a hundred different races? One of the numerically smallest races in the world has managed to work its way into all that is most powerful, most wealthy, most ancient, even in that Empire. This race seems, to

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foreigners, to exercise already a preponderating influence on English policy throughout the world. I shall try and give a very brief summary of this particular problem. I want the reader to understand that it is completely objective and dictated by no feeling of animosity.

It is well that I should point out to the English reader how difficult, and at times impossible, it is to give proofs of what I am about to advance. The English Press does not enjoy the same freedom as the French. Nor do English publishers, since to mention names in connection with certain facts might lead to proceedings for "libel".

A French newspaper is a pamphlet appearing daily. A work offered for sale in the bookshops may be no less a pamphlet though it run to four hundred pages. In both, men prominent in the worlds of politics or finance—the two terms are often synonymous—can be named and accused directly, and with *proof*, of speculation, theft, offences against nature, or assassination. The English public knows nothing of these things. Perhaps it is better so. But the *fact* is sufficient proof that freedom of the press as it is understood in England is very different from the freedom of the press in France, and that the two countries use the same term for totally opposed things.

Perhaps I should add that in my country the freedom to say anything and everything is one of the only weapons left to the really independent citizen.

CHAPTER TWENTY

CHARACTERISTICS AND ODDITIES

C*onventions.* The part played in France by the conventions is a very large one. It is safe to say that in England it is enormous. No Frenchman should dream of crossing the Channel without first making a careful study of those which he must, under no circumstances, contravene. In England the Frenchman is always slightly suspect. No matter that he is not necessarily a "weedy little man", no matter that he is not continually "effervescing with excitement"—these are preconceived views which every traveller will have to prove false anew. It is up to him to prove that other types of Frenchman exist than those which formed the staple of *Punch* caricatures prior to the years '14 and '15. The average Englishman would be amazed to meet any continental who happened to be tall and slim, self-possessed, and slightly sarcastic; and still more so, if he turned out to be silent and modest as well. These are qualities of which our friends across the Channel think that they have the monopoly, though they are fully capable of appreciating them when they find them exemplified in foreigners.

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Nevertheless, the newly-arrived Frenchman is held, *a priori*, to be an inferior, since he is a stranger, a "mere foreigner". If, in addition, he can be classed as a "southerner", he will rank still lower in public estimation. For all that, I have met many fair-haired Frenchmen, and not a few Englishmen so dark and so short that they might have been mistaken for Spaniards.

If I may venture to classify the degrees of the Englishman's insular mistrust, I should say that the Frenchman stands below the German and a degree or two above the Italian.

Not that the Englishman does not at times pride himself on being broad-minded, but it happens that those times are *never* the same as with us. Thus, a French Professor may hold an English degree and be a member of what we should call a Senior Board of Public Instruction; a French architect may preside over a meeting of his English colleagues: the mayor of a great city (as in Sheffield before the war) may be a German, and the first woman Member of Parliament (if I mistake not) an American. Such things would not be considered natural in France, and their acceptance across the Channel proves that the English know how to adopt foreigners. But these cases are exceptional.

From the very moment that he lands at Dover, at Folkestone or at Newhaven, the Frenchman is amused by the contrasts which he finds in all the ordinary contacts. The policeman and the Customs Official are neat, polite, but efficient. Everything runs on well-oiled wheels without noise or confusion, and there is a general air of comfort. One can get into a train without having to be a professional acrobat. Wherever one looks one gets the pleasant, if perhaps superficial, impression that things and people are in their right place.

Although in general it would be untrue to say that the habits of life are diametrically opposed on the two sides of the Channel, they differ much in detail, and one's natural instinct is to conclude that the inhabitants of the one country act in a way precisely opposite to their neighbours over the water. They keep to the left while we keep to the right—and this is true of more than mere road traffic. This variation in detail is more true, I think, as between England and the rest of the continent than as between the different countries of the mainland. Insularity?

My dear compatriot, as soon as you get to England, you will feel that everyone is quite kindly but quite firmly bent on telling you what you ought to do, and slightly annoyed that you don't know it already. The conventions of Society and the great world are more strictly observed there than here. There are a number of customs which are regarded as far more important than in France, and this fact leads to what one might describe as a universal conformity.

Conformity. By conformity I mean the unanimity which exists among all the inhabitants of a country in matters of religion, politics, morals and social usage. When it is complete it is probably the one sure basis on which the happiness of a people can be built. History is full of attempts made by various nations to reach such a degree of general agreement. The English have been probably more successful in this matter than any other people, and if it is true that "uniformity inevitably breeds boredom", what matter if it ensures happiness? England has never been more prosperous than in the early years of the century, when the strict observance of Sunday, which made the average Frenchman stamp with rage, was general.

We, who find it so difficult to understand why the

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English insist on calling their system democratic, get, perhaps, an inkling of what they mean when we realize the utter submission of all classes to customs which neither logic nor the critical spirit are strong enough to shake. If England lacks liberty, it does enjoy an undeniable equality in the ways of life and, which is extremely pleasant, in good manners.

It is this uniformity, not only of action but of thought, that ought, in my opinion, to make it impossible for the natives of continental countries to describe the English as "original". They may behave in ways that we often find surprising, but the quality of the surprise is always (or nearly always) the *same*. Originality, if it exists, is national rather than individual. More than most people they are all shaped in the same mould, but the point with them is that they carry the mould about with them. Wherever they go, too, they remain assured of their superiority. This is a source of great strength: and it is not the only one.

Self-control. Most important of all is self-control. I do not know whether I use the term precisely as it is used by the English, but I do know that it is one of the first things that a foreigner must learn on arriving in England. It is a combination of coolness, phlegm, reticence, and lack of warmth. If the Englishman feels an emotion he is careful to conceal the fact. I first realized this early in the war when one of my English friends, a charming young fellow, was killed. Although he had been undoubtedly far more intimate with the others than with me, who was a newcomer, I got the impression that I was the only person really to feel his loss. I could see no reason for *not* showing regret, and my friends probably thought my attitude both indecent and absurd, though they were far too well-bred to say so. However that may be, I certainly gathered

that my way of showing my feelings made them all rather uncomfortable, and disturbed the general easy mood of the Mess. In a French regiment his fellow-officers would have made no attempt to disguise their sorrow, though they would have been just as ready to do their duty. As it was, there was no sign, no inkling, of sadness. I found myself wondering whether, as a result of being repressed, emotion hadn't, in fact, become so blunted that it could hardly be said to exist at all. I believe I was wrong, though that is what I thought then and what most of my compatriots think still. I believe that this reticence is a kind of discipline which is wise from the point of view of the individual immediately concerned, and saves his companions from embarrassment.

I have an idea, too, that the sensibility of the English stands in greater need of such a discipline than does that of other nations. When it shows itself in connexion, say, with a dog that has been run over, one realizes how very violent it can be. That is why the English wisely keep a tight rein on their emotions. Those who saw the English crowds after the relief of Mafeking or on Armistice night, who watch their behaviour when a boxer or a (French) comic singer lands on their shores, realize the wisdom that has made self-control a national duty.

The Englishman's apparent coldness, dryness, insensibility is, I believe, no more than a necessary defence against emotions which might very easily get out of hand. Many English writers and artists have protested against this purely negative ideal, but it is arguable that some of them, at least, have gone too far in the other direction.

Love of animals. I mentioned just now a dog that had been run over. The English adore animals. It is

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all part and parcel of their failure to grow up which forms the mainspring of their happiness. This (permitted) form of emotionalism is to be found to an astonishing degree among English people, and always stands out in contrast to the rest of the national character.

I once witnessed the fury, and heard the violent language, of an officer who learned that one of his companions was proposing to kill a mole. . . . Now the mole does a lot of damage on cultivated ground, and it was on cultivated ground that this particular one had been found. Was my friend's righteous indignation a sign of goodness of heart, was it an expression of the chivalrous wish to protect the weak and the unarmed? I don't know. The man who wanted to kill the mole, a farmer by profession, was the kindest and most utterly trustworthy person one could meet. The other was a great beast of a bully, the kind of man who cheated at cards. He was one day summoned before a meeting of his fellow-officers and told to give back a sum of money which he had won, unfairly it appeared, from a number of subalterns whom he had "plucked" when they were in liquor. One finds sensibility in odd places.

A Frenchman's love of "nature" is usually directed to growing things, to plants, to the colour of grass, to the rise and fall of the land. With most of our friends across the Channel it is confined to a love of animals. And let me say here the French appreciation of nature is, on the whole, intellectual, the English, emotional. This is only another proof that the inhabitants of the two countries feel neither the same things nor in the same way. We should be careful, therefore, of accusing one another of lack of sensibility.

If the English appreciate animals and are happy in

their company, it may be because they are dumb. They are, on the other hand, very full of life. They are (don't laugh!) passionate. Dogs, cats, horses, love to amuse themselves. They have, too, a strong sense of sport—and that is a great bond.

This feeling for animals is, however, perfectly consistent with a love of hunting. It is no use trying to be logical in these things. An English author has written that no English gentleman feels comfortable at the end of the day unless he has killed something. This characteristic may be an atavistic survival dating from the time when men had to defend themselves against wild beasts. One must always remember, too, that hunting is a struggle. The animal that defends itself is always the most highly considered. The partridge, the grouse, the pheasant, must be strong on the wing: the fox must give hounds a good run. The sportsman likes to feel that he is out after an enemy, not a victim. One doesn't shoot a sitting bird or chase a lame fox. Hunting is the noblest of all forms of sport, because it is the only one involving risk. Since the prey is no longer dangerous, danger is sought instead in "negotiating" difficult obstacles.

Perhaps I ought to point out that there is, in the English love of nature (vegetable as well as animal) a good deal of illogicality and pretence. It is necessary in certain cases that nature should *appear* natural. The English garden and the English park is an example of what I mean. Nature is not outraged by having great trees shaved and clipped as they are in our French avenues and quincunces (though exceptions to this rule are permitted when dealing with box-hedges and yews). Nevertheless, fine timber is carefully trained and pruned, undergrowth is removed. And what about those lawns which are mown and

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rolled several times a week and cleared of any weeds that may have got a footing in them? Is not *that* torturing nature that she may appear more natural?

In other ways the Englishman glories in getting as far away from nature as possible. The horses who have their tails docked and their manes clipped, can scarcely be expected to appreciate these embellishments. Breeds are actually *produced*, the beauty of which consists in modifying the very bone structure of the wretched animal. As to the absurdities achieved by the use of scissors, nothing like them is to be found outside the monsters imagined by the artists of China and Japan.

The English Gentleman. There is no equivalent in any other language for this word. One workman will say of another, "He is a perfect gentleman". The quality of gentlemanliness, so highly prized in all ranks of English society, is very hard to define. Elsewhere the word has been adopted, and is taken to mean a certain bourgeois way of life in accordance with the average standards of modern civilization and morality. But this is not what the English word means. A Frenchman may say "so-and-so is no gentleman". There is never any doubt but that the phrase is intended to convey contempt, but a good deal of additional explanation is necessary before its actual meaning can be made clear.

Even an Englishman would be hard put to it to provide a definition of the word "gentleman". Is it enough to say with Chaucer:

He is gentle that does gentle deeds?

In this matter, as in so many others, the English are reluctant to dot their i's and cross their t's. One just *knows*. Everyone ought to be able just to *know*. Here

are a few words that I came across recently in *Country Life*:

There are some gentlemen who are gentlemen, who are not gentlemen; and there are other gentlemen who are not gentlemen, who are gentlemen.

A certain degree of social eminence—"gentle birth"—is assumed, but with it must go the ability to be *what one ought to be* when one is. Perhaps the most satisfactory description is this: that a gentleman has all the outward signs of being what his birth leads others to suppose that he is and what he would like them to suppose that he really and truly is by nature.

In every country, conventions, attitudes, manners, ways of life, are all conditioned by the national ideal of the perfect man. The gentleman (let us leave it at that) is the English ideal. Though, when the French talk of a "parfait gentilhomme" they use the same word, the type thus indicated differs considerably in the two countries. In France, the "gentilhomme" should, strictly speaking, be of noble birth, and should always realize that "noblesse oblige". What the eighteenth and even the nineteenth century knew as an "honnête homme" was, similarly, a representative of a certain social category. The phrase "galant homme", which one still hears occasionally, is, I think, as meaningless as it is pretentious. Have we no equivalent, then, for the "English gentleman"? Certainly not linguistically. The nearest thing is that bastard phrase "the French gentleman". He is becoming more and more rare, and is less and less taken by youth as a model. The young to-day prefer to model themselves on the product of the machine age, the chauffeur, the self-made man of substance. This is the inevitable result of a social system in which, in the words of M. Poirier in a famous play, "the only difference between one man

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and another is the difference of . . . money". It is a state of affairs which all democrats regard as ideal. When they are honest they admit that their motto is—"We want all the jobs and we want 'em quick"—in which they are, after all, only imitating their predecessors.

The Englishman is quick to note, in all countries and in all social classes, "who is a gentleman"—and who is not. His sensitiveness, his delicacy of perception never fails him. It must be admitted that the manners of the English gentleman have superseded the manners of all other aristocracies the world over, and that—at the risk of leading to ludicrous results—they have been copied by high society everywhere.

Liberty. This is a word which, like "independence", means something totally different on the two sides of the Channel. In France, I am free—

"to call a cat a cat and Rollet a rogue"

—if I did so in England, I should at once be served with a writ for "libel". *But* it is perfectly possible for an Englishman—though not for a Frenchman—to avoid military service in time of war by calling himself a "conscientious objector". He is sufficiently independent to find his own seat in a theatre without having to submit to the intolerable and quite useless attentions of an "ouvreuse", though not to commit suicide of his own free will. If he tries but fails, he will find himself in prison.

Liberty takes the form and the colour conditioned by national convention. No English boy would stand for a moment the uniform which is customary in French schools, *but* he is careful to dress in precisely the same way as his companions. Such is this slavery to fashion, that every detail, down to collar and tie, is identical.

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Examples of this kind could be multiplied indefinitely. The words, and even the ideas, employed by the inhabitants of one country have no equivalents in the language and way of life of their neighbours. Unfortunately, we in France have grown accustomed to copying words and phrases which belong by right to the British Constitution, but since our people and their ideas have remained unchanged, the result is a caricature.

Society or social groups. The reader must beware of committing that fault common to the people on both sides of the Channel, which consists in thinking that "social" means the same in France and in England. The letters are the same, but in France the word means something connected with the "social sciences", in England the life of the "great world".

And since men always have been and still are the victims of language, this probably accounts for the fact that the English word "socialism" has a kindly connotation; its French equivalent quite naturally implies class hatred.

English modesty. We have always been accustomed to qualify this word, ironically, as excessive prudery. Thus it has always seemed ridiculous to us French that our neighbours, especially our women neighbours, across the Channel should always be assumed to go through life without legs and almost without bodies, and that the fact of expecting a baby—no matter how legitimate—should be regarded as an unforgivable disgrace.

A number of writers (James Joyce and Lawrence, for example) have changed all that. Nevertheless, it seems to me certain words like devil, hell and belly are suspect even to-day. Another case of the influence of behaviour? But I should be inclined to say that

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English behaviour at the present time is far less good than it was in the Victorian age. Certainly the English are more hypocritical than the French, and take full advantage of the accessibility of France. The number of "irregular" couples crossing the Channel for the "week-end" is very considerable. I have been told by those who ought to know that it amounts to 40 per cent. of *all* couples entering our country. This habit may have been adopted out of respect for the Motherland.

May I be allowed to say a word about kissing? A French father always kisses his son no matter what the boy's age may be. In England he scarcely ever does so. But to us, as I said, it is quite extraordinary to find that in England a mother kisses her son on the lips. Such a thing in our own country would be considered shocking and unseemly. But I learn from Kipling that the custom is widespread on the other side of the Channel, where, similarly, a grown man salutes a young girl in the same way.

What conclusion, then, are we to draw? Only this, that we should not allow ourselves to be shocked, astonished, or critical. Voltaire refers to a certain country where, if a man did not invite a stranger to sleep with his wife, he was regarded as a boor. . . . I have never been there myself. But there are many countries in Europe where the warmth of welcome extended by women and young girls is so great, that one feels in duty bound to conform to the customs of the place. . . .

Humour. I have already referred to untranslatable words. . . . Here is one. Undoubtedly it is French in its origin, but the British have managed to get it adopted all over the world, and more particularly in France. We talk of "humour" and "humorous".

Larousse defines the first of these words as follows: "Gaiety disguised beneath a serious and ironical air, and therefore unsuspected." That does not, perhaps, quite describe English humour. The phrase to "keep one's sense of humour" in all circumstances implies a definite philosophy which is essentially British: the kind of attitude which enables a man to go into the water without feeling wet, which helps him to ignore what is happening at any given moment, which expresses the attitude of the average Englishman towards himself and of the English governing classes towards their followers. Such a philosophy makes it possible to turn even the most serious situation into a joke, but it is very far removed from French "gouaillerie", which may be extremely funny, is often vulgar and obscene, but is never serious. Neither we nor our neighbours use humour as the equivalent of "esprit", which I should be inclined to translate as "wit". It is common to both countries. Humour must be wrapped round by a certain amount of obscurity, must be indirect, "understood", suggested. It is all part and parcel of that English vagueness, and quite opposed to our French love of clarity.

Independence. Whether in ideas or in behaviour, this is found less frequently in England than in France. Can one say, in this connexion, that "the habit makes the monk"? Among the French there are still to be found quite a number of men who are independent in thought and character. Such individuals would, in England, be regarded as eccentrics or rebels—which comes to the same thing in a highly disciplined, and, as I have said before, conformist society.

Dress. The English are past masters, and without their equals anywhere, in the art of wearing the right clothes on the right occasions. Where men are con-

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cerned, their fashions, whether civil or military, have been copied, often badly, in every country under the sun. The Belgians, who were the first to adopt the khaki uniform, made it a thing of horror. What is far more difficult to imitate is the English casualness, the English way of *seeming* to wear their clothes carelessly. When an Englishman goes wrong sartorially he is dubbed a "bounder" (quite untranslatable). It may merely be that his hair is parted exactly in the middle. But it may be far worse. If a man played tennis in France in his braces, he would be merely funny. In England such a thing would be considered as an infringement of the moral code, the violation of a "taboo", and anyone guilty of such a thing would be treated as a criminal.

I have said that schoolboys wear no uniform, but substitute for it a voluntary sameness of dress down to the smallest details. This useless, though self-imposed, discipline goes a great deal further. Many gentlemen, by no means noted for elegance, are careful to go to Ascot wearing grey top-hats and morning coats. Both hat and coat is often of inferior quality and badly cut. But to be so dressed is superior, from the moral (?) point of view, to wearing a bowler from a first-rate hatter and a lounge-suit bought from a good tailor. Similarly, clothes of a certain kind are obligatory for all who attend the Eton and Harrow match.

May I point out to my English readers that sometimes in France to be well-dressed is to expose oneself to the spite of revolutionaries. A hundred and fifty years ago the word "sans-culotte" was coined to designate the true Republican, who had adopted the horrible fashion of trousers. That my friends across the Channel may realize fully the extent to which the

democratic spirit in contemporary France has gone, I will mention, too, that during the last war evening dress was forbidden in theatres for fear of offending the susceptibilities of the proletariat. . . . Like many bad habits, the custom of not dressing in the evening has since become common in all classes of society.

Modesty and a sense of dignity forbid an Englishman to wear any ribbon in his buttonhole. I have known Frenchmen who sport three or four! The same modesty prevails in the English fashion of referring to titles. Only initials are used. There are so many of them (V.C., K.T., G.C.B., etc.) that it becomes a puzzle for us to find out what they all mean. In France, decorations have nothing to do with merit. They are bestowed, as a rule, as a result of wire-pulling or seniority. On the other hand, we have nothing to compare in dignity to the Garter, for example, that Order of which, so it is said, Lord Melbourne expressed his appreciation in the delicious phrase: "There is no damned nonsense of merit about it."

Hospitality. The English have simplified the art of entertaining in their country houses by adopting the habit of putting the dates clearly in their letters of invitation (from such a day to such a day).

Their table manners, duly codified, have not been imitated elsewhere. Thus, a French child is taught always to put his hands on the table: the English, to do just the contrary. He is told that he must put the point of a spoon to his lips and not the side, etc. In France, the gentlemen leave the table at the same time as the ladies: in England, they stay behind to drink: but the port must always be circulated clock-wise. . . .

One would think that the extraordinary *number* of meals would present appalling complications. In England, however, it is simplicity itself, since every-

one conforms to the habit. Similarly, we are surprised at all the extra work involved in "nursery" meals being served separately. . . . All a matter of use, of second nature.

About the skill of English cooks, whether male or female, I shall say nothing. The "raw material" is almost always excellent—meat, vegetables, dairy produce, etc. Unfortunately, hideous mixtures known as "Sauces" out of bottles are usually added to all their dishes. The lack of variety in English diet discourages greediness. The particularly French vice of over-eating is thus avoided.

NOTE.—People of taste, and the good restaurants, have French cooks.

As to drink—few people in England know anything about wine. Beer is the stimulant of the working classes, whisky of those more fortunately placed. There are a number of port-lovers.

Banquets, in England as everywhere else, are tedious affairs, but the routine of the toast-list is particularly rigid. The King's health is always drunk first. Speeches are rather less pompous, and are certainly pleasanter to listen to than with us.

As in hospitality, so in putting strangers at their ease, the English are past masters. They know how to create a friendly atmosphere so surely, that one really feels at home, and often a good deal more comfortable than if one were.

Mysteries. I am concerned here only with mysteries of the most trivial kind. Those in the know can doubtless fathom them at once: to the foreigner they will remain for ever insoluble. No sooner does the traveller land from the steamer than he gets into a train. Immediately the door of his carriage is locked. Why? Mystery. At the house in which he stays

draughts are universal. On the other hand, in cinemas and tubes people are allowed to smoke until the atmosphere becomes unbreathable. Why this contradiction? Mystery. Neither in the street nor in a house may he ever make gestures: especially is shrugging the shoulders or rubbing the hands frowned upon. Movements of the head, however, are tolerated. Why? Mystery. Wheeled traffic uniformly keeps to the left: pedestrians usually to the right. Why? Mystery. Greeting takes the form of a question: "How do you do?" The proper reply is to repeat the question. Why? Mystery. On the other hand, should anyone answer by saying that he has got over his cold, his interlocutor would probably laugh in his face. One could fill a dictionary with such mysteries of English life.

Simplicity. Business, both public and private, is carried on in England in a way that makes us poor Frenchmen green with jealousy. The simple citizen is never treated as though he were suspected of harbouring criminal intentions. Everyone is kind, and there is a pleasing absence of useless formalities. On arriving at his destination by train, the traveller is allowed to remove his own luggage from the van. In France he has to hand over to an Inspector a check issued to him at his point of departure. The process takes at least a quarter of an hour. In France, suspicion: in England, trust.

Red tape. Despite what I have said, there is a good deal of this, and the stranger finds it tiresome. Side by side with restaurants where, up to a few years ago, liquor could be served only to "bona fide travellers", that is to say, to people who had really come from a distance, there are hotels where you can get nothing but water because they do not have a licence. The

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Head Waiter, however, can get you as many bottles as you like from the wine-merchant round the corner, and you can consume them on the premises.

Everyone in his place. Such was the title of a play by R. Benjamin, and the phrase is particularly applicable to English shops. The sort of familiarity which one finds in France is entirely absent from them. Never having visited a great English dressmaker, I do not know how business is carried on by such folk. I should be much surprised, however, to find in their showrooms the same sort of give and take between customer and saleswoman that I have so often witnessed in my own country. The French "lady" always seems to be asking the proprietor to do her the *favour* of making her a dress, a favour which is granted with a superior air—and at a high price.

Clubs. The Clubs frequented by the fashionable are much the same in England as they are in France. The former country set the fashion which the latter duly copied, though it has not always succeeded in assimilating the spirit of such institutions. The great thing in a club is that each member should feel entirely at home. This fundamental "note" disappears the moment a hint of officialdom intrudes. For instance, at the Military Club in Paris there is one dining-room for officers above a certain rank, another for the rest. The fact is that in a democratic country (using the word in the French sense) rigid rules have to be substituted for good manners.

Translation = Treason. So says an Italian proverb, but it holds equally well of all attempts to translate English into French, and vice versa. This unceasing "treachery" is, unfortunately, furthered by a large number of our professors. We are, if not the least musical people in the world, at least the people with

the worst ear for music. This explains how it is that so many Frenchmen know—or think they know—a language without being able to speak, hear, or understand it. The pronunciation of English in France is fantastic, and our professors are among the worst offenders. Whenever a candidate who really knows English (not only the pronunciation and the rhythm of the spoken speech, but everything about it which books can never teach) presents himself for a degree in a “living language”, the examiner does his very best—successfully—to “catch him out”. This is due, probably, to professional jealousy, but only in part. Another reason is that the examiner wants to show how well he knows a language (though he may be utterly ignorant of its essentials). I could give examples and mention names, but my publisher would probably tell me that I was being guilty of “libel”. As to translations from English into French, I know of no single one that is not guilty of some faulty rendering. My personal opinion is that while it is always possible—in French at least—to *paraphrase* English, literal translation is out of the question. I make an exception in favour of certain authors—Oscar Wilde among others—whose language we find of a remarkable clarity.

Misunderstandings. Faulty translation is never funnier than in conversation. One could fill a volume with such “gaffes”. I once heard with my own ears, at the time of the Paris Exhibition of 1900, an Attaché belonging to the British Embassy explaining that the opening of the British Pavilion would be delayed because “toutes les pipes sont choquées”—meaning that there was a stoppage in the drains.¹ I remember another saying “quelle joue”—meaning what insolence.

¹ “Pipe” in French usually means a tobacco pipe.

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I recollect a young English woman talking of "jour de lavement"¹ when she wished to refer to "washing day".

A respectable lady of British birth, who, though living in Paris for more than ten years had never succeeded in assimilating our language, was famous for her malapropisms. She was always vastly amused at them herself, and I suspect that a good many were deliberate. For instance, wishing to explain to a young Frenchman the pleasure it gave her to hear English spoken, she said, in an aside, "C'est délicieux de trouver sa langue dans la bouche d'un jeune homme". On another occasion, intending to explain that Mr So-and-So was bad-mannered, she exclaimed: "Enfin, à chaque fois que je le vois il me fait une grossesse!"

Everyone knows the story of the respectable English woman who, descending from the train armed with her phrase book, wished to take a cab, and addressed the driver in the following terms: "Etes vous fiancé?" and, on his replying in the negative, added, "Eh bien, prenez-moi!"

I imagine that the blunders committed by French people in England are no less comic and no less frequent.

Another thing: whenever a Frenchman uses an English word it is usually wrong (homely, footing, lady, Eton jacket, etc.). I have noticed much the same thing about the Englishman's employment of French.

Visits. A foreigner who comes to France for a long stay—and this applies, too, to Frenchmen from one part of the country arriving in another—will call on anyone to whom he wishes to make himself known. The opposite rule holds good in England. The former fashion is a tribute of politeness by the new-

¹ "Lavement" always, in French, means a "clyster".

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comer: the second implies a measure of social defence. It prevents people imposing themselves on their neighbours.

Modesty. This is a matter of outward appearance only, since most English people are extremely proud. But they have adopted a manner which is common to real gentlefolk the world over, of never seeming to know when they are performing a good action. It is a sign that what they are doing they are doing naturally. The same is true of the rule never to ask a question, for, as Voltaire says, "all questions are indiscreet".

It has been said that, since the English never speak of themselves, they speak very little. Let me conclude these remarks on English peculiarities by remarking that discretion is worth a good deal more than the most eloquent chatter.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE MIRACLE OF ENGLAND

THE phrase is more than merely rhetorical. This race of "gentlemen", this aristocracy which rules over almost one half of the earth's surface with an absence of brutality which, no matter what critics may say, is without parallel in history, which enjoys a prestige as great in countries where it is hated as in those where it is beloved—this race consists of forty-five million souls packed into a narrow island only a few parts of which may be said to be densely populated.

In the course of four centuries the national greatness of Britain has received but one serious set-back—when the American colonists seceded. Since that time her power has increased unceasingly.

Its character, however, appears to have changed completely, and to have become gentler as its limits expanded. The crude, vulgar, noisy, brutal Englishman, who was still to be found—if we are to believe English writers—at the beginning of the nineteenth century, has been transmogrified into an individual of refined tastes and delicate sensibilities. His manners

—since the French aristocracy, destroyed at the Revolution, is no longer there to act as a model for the world—have become the touchstone of decent behaviour everywhere. His clothes, his games, and (though distorted) his methods of government, have been and are copied all over the habitable globe.

The island of Britain comprises a small extent of very fertile farm-land, great mineral wealth, and a number of flourishing industries. But the real foundation on which her incredible position has been built is trade, and this has been so brilliantly administered that London ranks as the chief market of the world for numberless products of countries which are situated at a very great distance.

Money in England is still respected. The members of her Nobility have money, and the moneyed man aspires to be admitted to the ranks of the Nobility. The great merit of an hierarchy of the kind that exists in England is that those who make fortunes at once try to imitate the manners of an hereditary upper class which, in its turn, has a high sense of the rôle it has to play in the national life. It controls local politics and has no small part in the wider concerns of Parliament. It counts for a very great deal in the prestige enjoyed by Englishmen abroad.

Because she is rich, England always knows what is happening elsewhere in the world. Because she is rich, England encourages all movements tending to favour her power and checks all those that might be harmful to it.

She is sensitive in the matter of her national honour, more sensitive than France ever was, even under Louis XIV. For France to take offence it was first necessary that she be insulted, or threatened with insult. England goes further, and regards as insolence or as an un-

friendly act anything that might be regarded as merely contrary to her interests. . . .

She has a strong sense of her Rights. She cannot understand how they can ever be questioned. In a comic episode of his *Roi des Montagnes*, Edmond About has described the way in which Europeans regard the attitude of the English towards foreigners. A travelling Englishwoman is made prisoner by some brigands. She is deprived of her customary lunch, and exclaims: "I am English and I have a right to eat." The other travellers captured with her don't matter. She is *English*. It never occurs to her that a brigand chief could possibly raise an objection, could possibly attempt to thwart her. The incident might appear to be exaggerated—but it scarcely is. Such assurance is natural to those who are in the habit of commanding. The Englishman is used to being master in his own house, that is to say, over nearly three-quarters of the earth's surface. It is but natural that he should think that the remaining quarter ought to belong to him as well.

Wherever an Englishman settles, whether in Paris, Pau, Florence, Madeira, Cairo or Singapore, he is at home. If he can get together ten compatriots they at once make a "little England" which, without the slightest sense of embarrassment, sets up its standards of disciplined epicureanism discreetly masked behind a façade of good manners and British morality. This nucleus of muscular epicureanism soon becomes a centre of attraction, for the cult of easy living is, fundamentally, the ideal of humanity.

Quite probably this small English colony, with its superb disregard of all local habits and traditions, with its elegance, often no more than relative, its childish complications, its recreations, regarded as the most

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important things in life, its skill in wasting time agreeably, will become the pleasantest and most fashionable "circle" of any place in which it may happen to take root.

The wise man may smile at the spectacle of the foolish, but they can always say in the words of, I think, Shelley:

Ye are many, they are few.

And these foolish ones, whether they be French or Brazilian, Sikhs or citizens of Monaco, will end by dressing, walking, eating, in the English manner, playing at tennis or polo, and even talking a comic English dialect by dint of adorning their own language with English phrases for the most part used wrongly and pronounced still worse.

This manner of colonization by means of pleasant living and snobbery is subtle, adroit, and shows much psychological insight. It is clever to create snobbish standards in one's own favour. Therein lies one aspect of the "miracle of England", and not the least important.

What chiefly makes it a miracle, however, is the fact that merely as a result of organization and national solidarity, a country of some forty million inhabitants, with a few thousand soldiers and ships scattered over the Seven Seas, should have been able to govern and exploit, by peaceful means, three hundred and fifty-five million human beings.

It is the duty of a historian to record, not to judge, and one of the things he will record is that during the twentieth century the British Empire was the guarantee of civilization. Opinions may vary about how this extraordinary success came to be. All that a civilized man need hope is that it will continue. A study of the

history of all the great empires seems to show that success is mainly due to the existence of an aristocratic, an hierarchic, and, consequently, a highly disciplined system. To impose order on others, a nation must first be assured of order at home, and that can never be the case under a democracy. Fraternity, to which Mr. Anthony Eden referred at Southbridge on 28th June, 1938, can never alone succeed in maintaining order. There are several sorts of fraternity. That felt by the rich man on his horse for the beggar walking in the mud, is not the worst. It is the type of relationship which exists between the Englishman and the rest of the world. He wishes to be a *good* master everywhere, but, still, a *master*. The imitations, sometimes very faint, of the English Constitution throughout the world, have but served to strengthen the authority of Great Britain. But this spirit of imitation is on the down grade. Mr. Eden has himself said: "The general expansion of the democratic and Parliamentary doctrine which was almost universal in Europe during the nineteenth century, is a thing of the past."¹ One of the things that surprises me most is that an educated man like Mr. Eden should have failed to find a word in which to embody the different meanings of the English and French idea of "democracy".

It may be that the "practical joke" will continue for a long time yet. One thing is certain, that, just as the Frenchman driving a car instinctively goes to the right while the Englishman goes to the left, so, when faced by problems of politics or society, the Englishman will continue to see things white, the Frenchman, black. They may like one another, it is true: understand one another they never will. The inhabitants of one country long settled in the other will *act* as though

¹ Speech at Southbridge.

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they understood, will *live* as though they understood. That is something, and perhaps the words of the Apostle will always hold good—"Credo quia absurdum."

However that may be, so long as there are gentlemen in England and gentlemen in France, there will always be hearts and minds capable of mutual affection despite all differences of politics. For that affection, on both sides of the Channel, springs from the fact that, of the two peoples, one still is, and one may again become, the refuge of that thing essential for all civilized life—"good manners".

